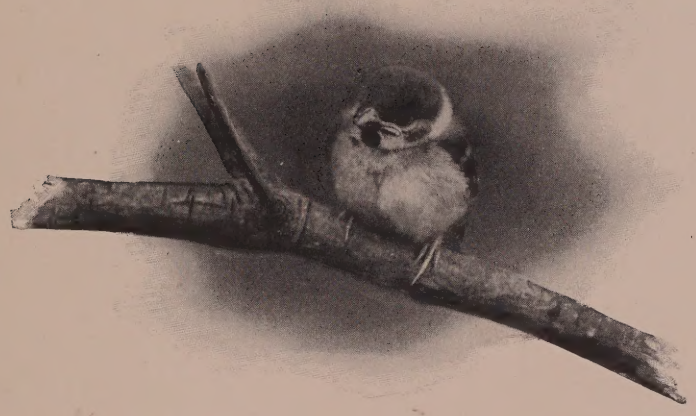
THE STONECHAT

"The male is a strikingly handsome bird"

KEARTONS' NATURE PICTURES

BEAUTIFULLY REPRODUCED IN PHOTOGRAVURE, COLOUR, AND BLACK AND WHITE FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICHARD AND CHERRY KEARTON



WITH DESCRIPTIVE TEXT
BY
RICHARD KEARTON, F.Z.S., ETC.

CASSELL AND COMPANY, LIMITED
LONDON, NEW YORK, TORONTO AND MELBOURNE
1910

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4/16/85 (SW)

PREFACE

DO not go through the world blind to Nature's beauties or deaf to her music.

Every intelligent man and woman should learn to read something in the great wonder book of Nature, and thus add an incalculable pleasure to life. The world and all that is in it belongs only to those who enjoy it. One day I was walking across an estate in my neighbourhood, and was met by a stranger who asked: "To whom does this place belong?" "To me," I replied. I suppose my sun-bleached green tweed jacket and rough, muddy boots filled him with worldly incredulity, for he exclaimed: "Indeed! I thought it was owned by Sir So-and-So." "Yes," I answered, "he is the nominal owner, and takes the rent and the trouble, but I get all the pleasure out of the place and count that the real test of ownership."

Even a little knowledge of birds, beasts, insects, and flowers adds a great and unfailing joy to life, for they are constant friends, with an infinite variety of appeal to all that is sanest, healthiest, and best in human nature. Take our feathered friends as an example; they charm us by their sweet songs, brilliant colours, graceful movements, and interesting habits, yet never seem to grow stale or lose their sprightly youth. You may have left your old home in Devonshire, Yorkshire, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, or anywhere else, to dwell in the murk and gloom of some great city; and if you return again ten, twenty, or thirty years afterwards, you will find that, although the men and women you left behind have changed and grown old, the birds have not. They show no

change of colour, no weakening of voice, no lack of activity, or loss of beauty. Therein lies one of their greatest charms: they link you to your youth, revive your hope, and renew your capacity for healthy enjoyment.

The present work has been prepared at the request of friends who have expressed a wish for Kearton pictures from Nature on a larger scale of reproduction, and in order to give the man or woman, boy or girl, who knows but little of the country-side a bright and stimulating glimpse of the wild creatures dwelling therein.

As a gentleman who recently took the chair at one of my public lectures very aptly put it: "The camera and its devotees have altered the whole attitude of the public towards the subject, and to-day there is a demand for accurate pictures and first-hand observation."

Throughout the pages of this work no system will be followed; birds, beasts, reptiles, and insects will jostle together as they jostle in Nature's own domain. The reader may, therefore, dip into it here, there, or anywhere, and find something to interest or admire, just as he or she might do in a walk through the woods, along the seashore, or across some lonely moor.

First and foremost this is a picture-book, as its title implies; but the text, although of secondary importance, will be as accurate, informatory, and interesting as care and experience can make it.

Familiar wild birds and beasts, seen almost daily round some British homestead or other, will find a place side by side with the very rarest feathered friends that visit our islands to breed. Bold Cock Robin will be figured together with the rare and gentle Red-Necked Phalarope, the cunning and wary Fox sitting outside his "earth," and the wee, timid Mouse at supper; the Ptarmigan in the grey solitudes of her mist-wreathed mountain home, and the Partridge in the hedge; the noisy Oyster Catcher by the restless sea, and the Skylark in the peaceful meadow; the gay Green Lizard and the sober-coloured Toad; the Wood-Pigeon that coos softly in the copse, and the Owl that screeches weirdly in the woods by night; the Gannet sitting in stately grandeur on the topmost ledge of a towering maritime cliff, and the Ringed Plover that meekly runs upon the shingle below: these, and many others, will be figured and described.

In short, it is confidently believed that the work will form the finest gallery of sun pictures of wild birds and beasts, taken amidst their natural surroundings, ever published in this or any other country.

R. KEARTON.

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"The male helps the female to feed the young ones."

THE STONECHAT

THE Stonechat is an inhabitant of rough commons and waste lands, where furze, heather, and brambles grow in tangled profusion. The male is a strikingly handsome bird. His sharply contrasted colours of black, white, and rusty brown, added to his fondness for perching on the topmost spray of any and every bush that comes in his way, make it well-nigh impossible to pass him by unseen. Restlessness seems to be one of his most pronounced characteristics, for he is always busy flying from one bush to another, or dropping from his elevated look-out to the ground in pursuit of some insect which his sharp little eye has detected below.

Although not a very accomplished vocalist when compared with the Nightingale or the Blackcap, his excited antics whilst delivering his short, sweet notes on the wing are sometimes very amusing. My friend Mr. Ussher has very aptly described them, in his "Birds of Ireland," as like a ball rising and falling on the jet of a fountain.

The female differs considerably in appearance from her strikingly attired mate, but in spite of this fact one feels that her sober brown plumage is entirely in harmony with her natural surroundings.

The spring call-notes of the Stonechat may be imitated with ease and exactness by tapping two pebbles together, but, curiously enough, after the young ones have been hatched they change in sound from *u-tic, u-tic* to notes resembling *chuck, chuck.*

MALE STONECHAT.

Nest-building is commenced in April or May, the structure being well hidden at the foot of a gorse bush amongst heather, or tangled grass growing round brambles. It is very difficult to find unless the female is sitting hard, and can be watched on to her eggs. Otherwise a pair of birds may be kept under observation for hours in vain.

The eggs number from four to six, of a pale bluish green ground colour, closely mottled round the larger end with reddish brown spots. Occasionally these are very faint and I have seen specimens from which they were absent altogether. Eggs may occasionally be found as late as the end of June, which seems to support the contention of some ornithologists that the species is double-brooded.

If a Stonechat's nest be kept under observation for a few hours it will be seen that the male helps the female to feed the young ones, but that he works with considerable irregularity. Sometimes he will remain away from the nest for an hour at a stretch, and at others he will visit it with insects as many as thirty times in the space of sixty minutes. Like the male members of many other species, he is guilty of the cowardice of passing over any food he may have collected for his offspring to his mate for conveyance to the nest, if there should be anything near it calculated to make him nervous.

Although the Stonechat is a migratory bird in Continental countries, where it breeds, it stays with us during the whole round of the year, and I have seen it more numerously in the Isle of Man during the winter than in any other part of the United Kingdom.

Common Guillemots.

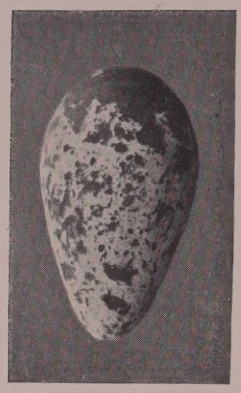
"The Common Guillemot rides the waves as buoyantly as a cork."

THE COMMON GUILLEMOT

THE Common Guillemot is a bird of the boundless ocean. It rides the waves as buoyantly as a cork, dives with great ease and strength, and makes but little use of the solid earth, excepting in the breeding season, or when driven ashore by a succession of power-exhausting gales.

It breeds on flat-topped ocean rock stacks and ledges of maritime cliffs, and is common in all suitable localities round the British coast. In cliffs with long ledges running in the lines of stratification the birds sit shoulder to shoulder, and their pure white breasts and dark heads and necks frequently make them stand out in bold and striking contrast to the rock behind them.

This bird does not make the slightest pretence whatsoever at nest-building. Her single egg is of large size, and admirably shaped for the perilous position it generally occupies. Instead of being oval in shape, like those of the owl, it is formed after the manner of an elongated pear, so that when stirred by a strong gust of wind, or by the bird leaving it in undue haste, it does not roll away, but simply revolves upon its own axis, describes a small circle, and is in a great many cases thus saved from destruction. This fact probably gave rise to the one-time belief that the Guillemot glued her egg to the rock whereon it was laid. Of course, it does not always avail, for I have seen eggs fall off very narrow ledges in showers when the sitting birds have suddenly been frightened by the



GUILLEMOT'S EGG.

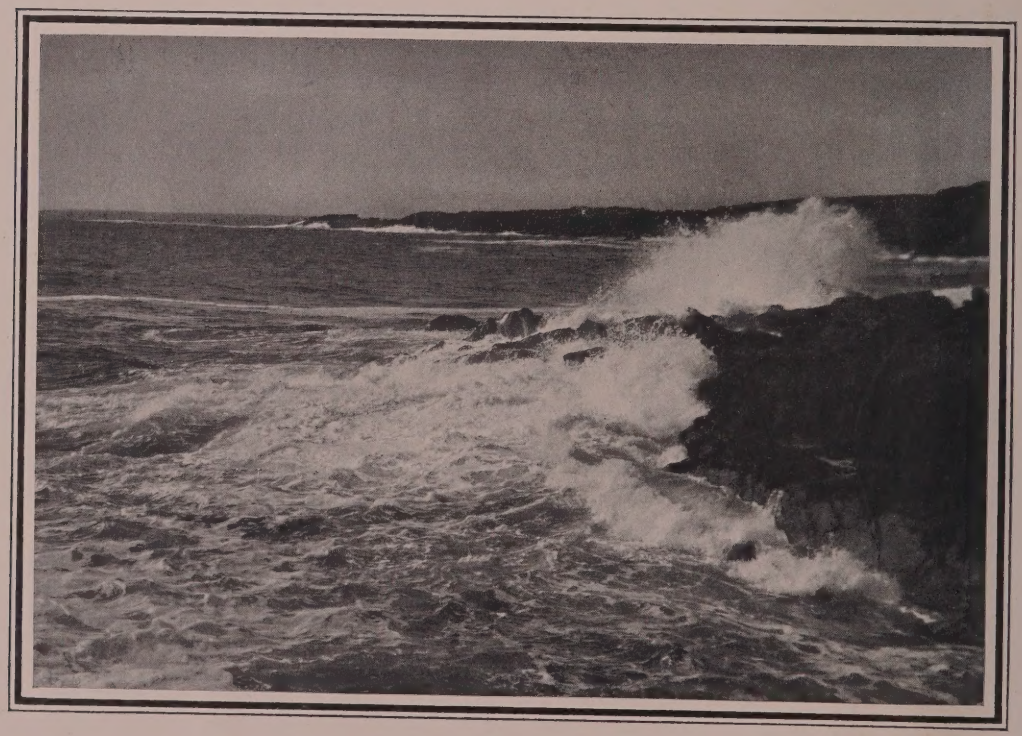
discharge of a small cannon aboard an excursion steamer. In such circumstances it is quite pathetic to watch a Guillemot darting after her treasure in helpless anguish as it rushes downward through the air and falls with a plop into the sea.

The eggs laid by this species present an almost endless variation, both in ground colour and markings, and it would be almost impossible to select two specimens exactly alike out of a collection of thousands. Every tint of ground colour, from white to pea-green blue or purplish-brown, may be met with, spotted, blotched, and streaked with every shade of brown and black. Another curious thing in regard to this matter is the fairly well established fact that an individual bird always lays the same type of egg.

Where Guillemots breed by the thousand together on flat-topped rock stacks, such as the Pinnacles at the Farne Islands, it is interesting to speculate upon whether each bird recognises its own egg, whilst it remains clean, by its ground colour and markings. When breeding on ledges it has been proved beyond dispute, by marking birds, that each individual returns to incubate its own egg.

When a young Guillemot is between three and four weeks old it is taken down to the sea by its mother. Some observers say that she carries it on her back, and others that she holds it in her bill by one wing whilst she descends to the water.

Fishermen call this bird the Murre, a name derived from the sound which may be heard, morning, noon, and night, wherever a vast colony has assembled for breeding purposes.



The Fox.

The haunt of the Fox.

THE FOX

THIS cunning and exceedingly wary little animal is beloved of the huntsman, and hated by the gamekeeper and the hen-wife.

A whole volume of wonderful stories of its sagacity might be written. I have heard it asserted in widely different parts of the country, by people who firmly believed in it, that a Fox, when infested with vermin, will secure a piece of rabbit's skin, proceed to some pond or stream, back slowly into the water, and finally immerse himself, allowing the piece of fur-clad skin to slip from between his jaws and float away with its cargo of cheated parasites.

Our photogravure plate was secured in the following circumstances: I was standing one evening watching through my field-glasses some almost full-grown cubs, playing like puppies round the mouth of an "earth," on a Surrey hilltop, some seven hundred yards distant, when a gamekeeper who joined me suggested that I ought to try to get a photograph of them. Shaking my head, I replied that it would be vanity, as I required to be so close with my stereoscopic camera that the animals would scent me and never come out. However, one day the wind was blowing so strongly and steadily across the Foxes' hole towards a thorn bush some seven yards away, that I determined to try my hand.

Making a detour, I crept beneath the

"WHO SAID 'FOX ?"

bush, fixed my apparatus, and then cut innumerable branches off other thorn trees growing not far away and drove them into the ground right round the one beneath which my camera was hidden. At last I had only two small peep-holes, one for the lenses and the other for me to watch my field of focus through. Placing myself at full length upon the ground, I waited five hours and a quarter on end before Reynard put in an appearance. When he did it was so late in the evening that I was compelled to give an "Imperial" flashlight plate a two-seconds' exposure, with only stop 16 on a lens working at f 6. Judging that it would be useless to try to turn my dark slide round with a view to making a second exposure, I put my fingers to my lips and began to squeal in imitation of a rabbit being killed by a stoat or weasel. This greatly excited my "sitter," and his forefeet were moving so rapidly up and down that he appeared to be literally dancing on the mound in front of him. At last he lost control over himself, and came stealthily forward to investigate. When he got half-way between his home and the bush beneath which I was hidden, his Vulpine heart failed him, and he returned to cover.

Foxes usually bring forth from three to five young ones, although a larger number is sometimes met with, and feed them upon rabbits, leverets, wild duck, grouse, curlew, partridges, young blackbirds, and thrushes, and even such small deer as mice.

Young Song Thrushes.

"The Song Thrush builds a nest quite unlike that of any other British bird."

THE SONG THRUSH

THIS sober-coloured bird is one of the best known and most widely appreciated feathered vocalists inhabiting the British Islands. It sings for practically eleven months in the year, and at the height of the season the late Mr. Witchel recorded one bird thus engaged for no less than sixteen hours during a single day. It will pour forth its vehemently cheerful song from the top of a tall tree, a lowly bush, a cabbage, or even the bare ground, and may occasionally be heard whilst it is on the wing. A friend of mine was listening to a Throstle—as the bird is called in the North of England—in full song in a tree over his head one day, when, to his great surprise, the unfortunate creature suddenly stopped and fell dead at his feet; over-exertion had probably ruptured some important blood-vessel.

In the summer of 1909 a pair of these birds reared a brood of young ones in a laurel close to the back door of my house, and I noticed that the male frequently took up his station on the top of a rustic arch and sang between his journeyings after food for the young. Another curious thing was that he always entered the nesting bush from one side, and his mate from the other.

MALE SONG THRUSH.

One morning, whilst waiting for an opportunity to take some moving pictures of the thrushes feeding their chicks, the male came sidling across a lawn towards me in fighting attitude. For a long time I could not understand the reason for this strange behaviour, but at last noticed a worm on the ground close by where I was standing, and understood that he wanted the creature and was threatening me. Retiring a few paces, I watched him pick it up and carry it off to his chicks in triumph. After this I secured a garden fork and frequently dug worms for him. We were soon on the best of terms, and he never went far in search of food when he saw me with the implement in my hands.

The Song Thrush builds a nest quite unlike that of any other British bird. It is made externally of slender twigs, dead grass, and moss, mixed with clay or mud, and lined with cow-dung, or mud mixed with dead wood. When lined with the first-named material, it will hold water to such an extent that after a very heavy downpour of rain I have seen the eggs under water. This happened, of course, before the Thrush had commenced to sit. Why the species makes such a structure is a mystery, for the hard lining is not an imperative necessity, as is proved by chicks occasionally being reared in a nest similar to that of the blackbird, when the usual materials for its interior cannot be secured.

THE SQUIRREL

"Sitting up on a stump with its bushy tail over its back."

"A warm sunny day will always tempt it forth."

THE SQUIRREL

AS Macgillivray, the old Scottish naturalist, truly remarks, "the agility of the Squirrel, its lively disposition and beautiful form, render it a general favourite." It looks much more at home, and far prettier, when scampering amongst the boughs of a tree, or sitting up on a stump with its bushy tail over its back, than it does on the ground, where it runs like a rabbit, with its brush stretched out behind it. Although so exceedingly nimble, I have on more than one occasion seen a Squirrel, when alarmed, miscalculate the distance from one branch to another, and fall to the ground below.

A Cumberland gamekeeper recently told me that he once witnessed a great chase between a stoat and a Squirrel, the latter animal only escaping by reason of its greater ability to leap from the slender branch of one tree to that of another. I can readily believe this, for I have watched stoats climb thorn bushes, and even straight smooth hazels no thicker than a man's thumb, with ease and expedition, and remember on one occasion a boy, who was out climbing for me in a Westmorland wood, finding a dead one in a Squirrel's nest amongst the branches of a fir tree, not less than forty feet from the ground.

It is a popular but quite mistaken belief that the Squirrel hibernates during the winter months. A warm sunny day will always tempt it forth to one of its hidden stores of food; I have, indeed, seen Squirrels abroad showing all their wonted animation even when the snowflakes have been flying thick and fast. I do not know whether the same thing holds good in regard to the grey Squirrel or not, but I have seen it in America hunting for food during very cold weather in the early spring.

The food of the Squirrel consists of

hazel nuts, acorns, beech mast, buds, branches and bark of young trees, and

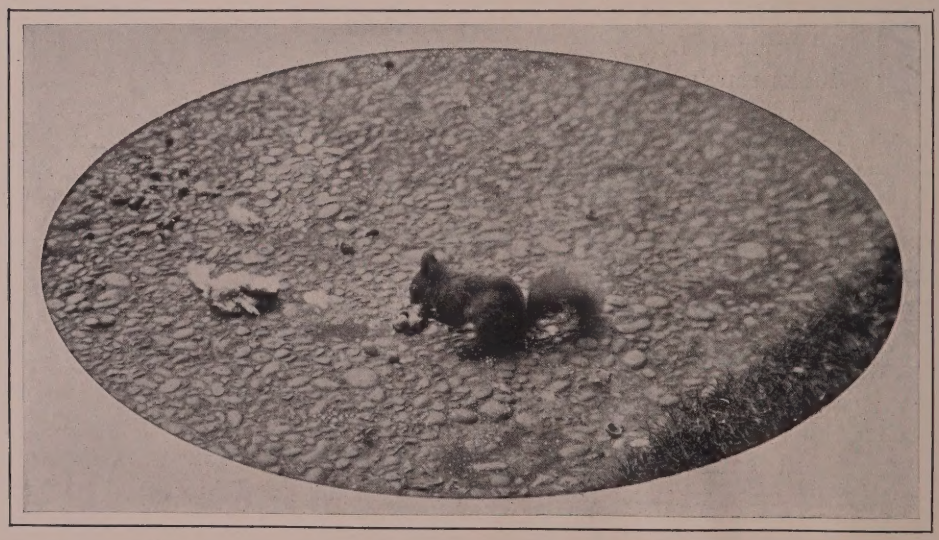
A CHARACTERISTIC ATTITUDE.

sometimes an individual will develop a morbid taste for the eggs or young of birds. Some years ago, whilst wandering through a Surrey wood, I heard a couple of song thrushes making a great ado, and creeping cautiously towards the place saw a Squirrel scamper away from their nest, in which I found the remains of a newly-killed young one.

There can be no denying the fact that this pretty little animal, when too numerous, does considerable harm in plantations of young trees; and whilst in Berlin, on one occasion, I was told that the keepers in the Tiergarten are on this account reluctantly compelled to shoot a number every year.

The Squirrel makes its nest of dead grass, leaves, moss and wool. In the North of England the last-named material is nearly always present in large quantities. The nest is placed on the branches of fir trees, in forks where the large branches separate from the trunk, occasionally in holes in trees, and I have known of one instance where a family was reared in a nest built in the thatch of a haystack.

The young ones generally number three or four, and when taken quite early make interesting though very uncertain-tempered pets. Squirrels show great aversion to ferrets, and develop an amusing storm of anger upon catching sight of one.



Female Sparrow Hawk and Young.

"Directly young Sparrow Hawks see their mother approaching . . . they sit up in the nest."

THE SPARROW HAWK

THIS species breeds in well-wooded districts throughout the British Isles. At one time it was thought by naturalists whose opinion was entitled to a great deal of respect that it never built its own nest, but simply contented itself with the old home of a carrion crow or wood-pigeon. I have always thought otherwise, and some years ago not only watched a hen Sparrow Hawk adding sticks to her nest, but photographed her in the act of doing so, as shown on the next page. The structure is a mere platform of twigs with a slight hollow in the centre, and as incubation advances the sticks become flecked with bits of white down from the bird's body; but whether these are an intentional adornment, or simply drop out by accident whilst she is preening herself, it is impossible to say. The nest may sometimes be found thirty or forty feet from the ground, and at others can be touched with a walking-stick in the hand of a man of average height standing beneath it. On one occasion I found a nest in a holly bush.

The eggs number from four to six, five being a usual clutch. In ground colour they are white tinged with blue or bluish green, and are handsomely marked with pale and rich dark brown spots and blotches.

The male Sparrow Hawk is somewhat smaller than the female. He provides food for her whilst she is sitting, but never brings any kind of prey to the nest. I have watched him fetch a full-grown peewit along in his talons, alight with it on some dead tree stump fifty or sixty yards away, call her, and, whilst she was enjoying a meal, fly down to the nest

FEMALE SPARROW HAWK ADDING STICKS TO HER NEST.

and leisurely examine the eggs.

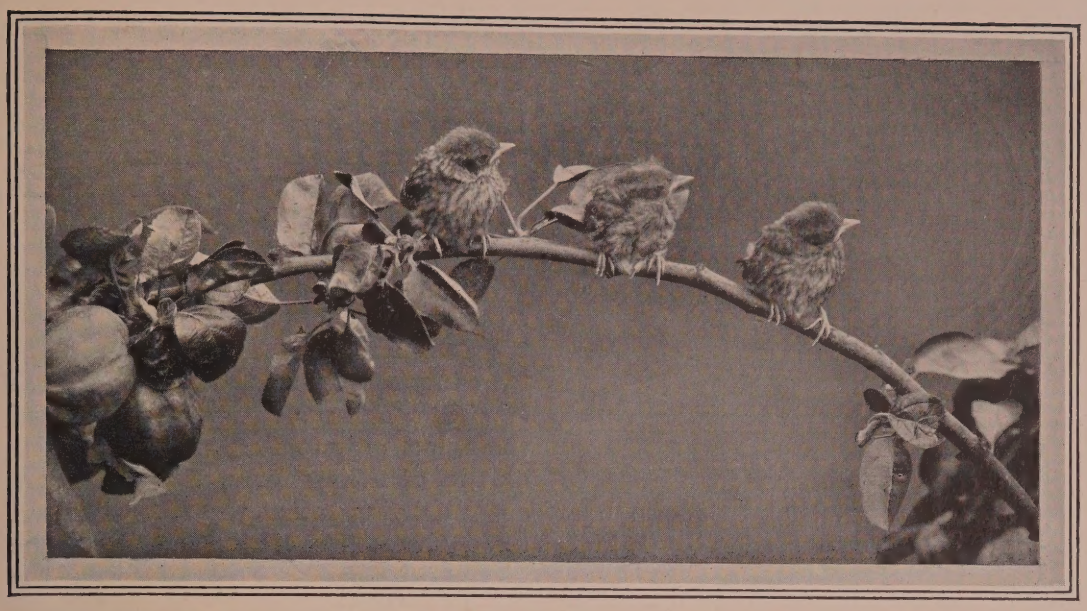
Individual birds of this species differ very widely in the matter of boldness. Some years ago I climbed to a nest containing hard sat eggs, and was mobbed by both parent birds. The female tried several times to strike my head, and I had to duck involuntarily in order to avoid her, whilst a shepherd who accompanied me stood at the foot of the tree, laughing at my novel experience.

When the down-clad young ones are hatched, family labours in their welfare are divided. The male bird does all the hunting for prey, whilst the female stays at home to look after the chicks and impartially divide the food amongst them when it has been secured. During this period the fledglings of small, defenceless birds are much persecuted; and, judging from the widely different species brought to the nest, the male Sparrow Hawk must make long flights in search of his quarry.

Directly young Sparrow Hawks see their mother approaching, they give her a noisy welcome by soft, oft-repeated chittering notes, uttered whilst they sit up in the nest; but if she should happen to give vent to her alarm-cry, they instantly become silent and crouch quite flat.

Like many other species, this bird is very partial to an old haunt, and I know small favourite woods in the North of England where a nest may be found season after season with unbroken regularity.

Hedge Sparrow on Nest.



"The chicks were photographed just after they had fluttered out of the nest."

THE HEDGE SPARROW

THIS gentle little bird in its unobtrusive coat of brown is almost as well known as robin redbreast himself. It frequents our gardens all the year round, quietly picking up crumbs, or whatsoever else it can find, in the winter, and ridding them of noxious pests in the summer. It may always be known by the nervous shuffling of its wings as it hops about.

The male has a cheerful, though not long-sustained, song, which I have on several occasions heard him uttering as late as ten o'clock at night, when most feathered vocalists, saving perhaps the nightingale and the garrulous sedge warbler, are supposed to be asleep.

This species commences nesting operations as early as March, if the weather happens to be mild and open, and continues breeding until June, or even later. As a matter of fact, the chicks figured at the head of this chapter were photographed just after they had fluttered out of the nest, on the last day of July. At least two broods are reared in a season, and I have known this to occur in the same nest.

The Hedge Sparrow builds in hawthorn and privet hedges, brambles, nettles, and low bushes of almost every kind, and sometimes it may even be found in heather. The structure consists of slender twigs, rootlets, bits of dead grass and moss, with an inner lining of wool, hair, and feathers. In finishing off her nest the Hedge Accentor, as some naturalists prefer to call the bird on account of its slender bill, exercises great pains, taking piece after piece of material, placing it in position, and then turning round and round in the structure, pressing her breast against its inner walls, and thus rendering them smooth and neat.

HEDGE SPARROW'S NEST.

The eggs, numbering from four to six, are of a beautiful turquoise blue colour. Before commencing to sit, individual members of this species sometimes resort to the curious practice of covering their eggs with moss and hair, before the work of incubation has commenced, as if conscious of the fact that their striking colour might attract attention.

The cuckoo frequently victimises this bird, and it is quite pathetic to see a pair of poor little Hedge Sparrows vainly trying to satisfy the enormous appetite of the monster foster chick in their nest.

Although a timid creature, easily scared away to cover, the Hedge Accentor does not appear readily to profit by experience. In the winter I have trapped specimens, marked, and released them, but only to find, within an hour or two of their release, that they were again dallying round the food that had lured them into captivity. The same kind of indiscretion characterises the doings of the robin and blue tit, but not the Common Sparrow. I have never in my life deceived a member of the last-named species twice by the same trick.

Bullfinch on Nest.

"Her mate fed the chicks about every quarter of an hour."

THE BULLFINCH

NO British bird has increased in numbers during recent years to the same extent as the Bullfinch, and this increase is said to be directly attributable to the benevolent efforts of the Wild Birds' Protection Society.

In many respects it is a bird of curious character, and in spite of the fact that it is common and much studied, we know little of the why and wherefore of its ways. For instance, what reason has it for attacking fruit buds, and leaving those that produce leaves alone? Why does the bird devote so much unwelcome attention to one tree and none to another, which, to mere human discernment, appears equally suitable and tempting?

Although seen in families at certain periods of the year the Bullfinch never appears to associate with its feathered neighbours of a different species. It is inordinately fond of water, and I know of no bird, in this or any other country, that drinks and bathes so much during hot weather. Individuals of this species differ as widely in disposition as members of the human race. I have known an incubating female so full of nerve and confidence that after a few days' acquaintance she grew so bold that she would allow me to take her in my hand, and place her in any different position I chose in the nest. On the contrary, some individuals of the species are of such a shy and wild disposition that they will forsake their eggs rather than face the ordeal of the camera.

It is a very fortunate arrangement for the chicks of many species of birds that both parents attend to their wants.

BULLFINCH'S NEST.

A few seasons ago I found the nest of a Bullfinch in a stunted yew growing on the edge of a wood. When the young had been hatched I fixed a hiding tent near by and spent three days in making observations and taking photographs. The old birds always called to each other as they approached the nest, brought the caterpillar and other insect food, which they had collected in the crop, and regurgitated it for the young. During the first day male and female came turn and turn about, but throughout the second and third days the latter never once put in an appearance, nor did I hear her utter a single call note. In all probability she had fallen a victim to some stealthy sparrow hawk or marauding cat. Her mate fed the chicks about every quarter of an hour, but did not appear to utter his plaintive call note so frequently.

The Bullfinch builds a somewhat curious nest, consisting of a platform of slender birch twigs, cunningly interlaced with a depression in the middle. It is neatly lined with fine fibrous roots, and, occasionally, hairs. The eggs are of a pale greenish blue ground colour, spotted, speckled, and sometimes streaked with purplish brown, and number from four to six.

The song of this bird is very soft and short, and its plaintive call note, frequently uttered, sounds something like *poneet.*

MALE RED-BACKED SHRIKE

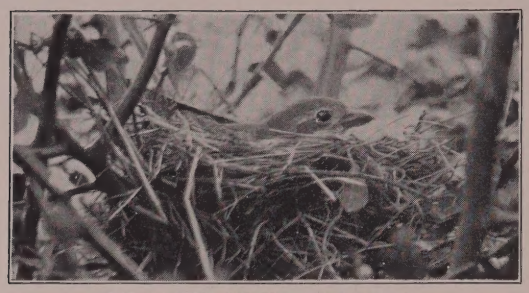
"He makes an ideal lover and a good husband."

"Besides killing small birds for their own consumption, they sometimes feed their chicks upon them."

THE RED-BACKED SHRIKE OR BUTCHER BIRD

THE Red-Backed Shrike is probably the most fierce and pugnacious small bird to be found breeding within the confines of the British Isles. I have on more than one occasion seen the male in hot pursuit of a blackbird, or song thrush, that had quite innocently strayed too near the tyrant's sitting mate for his peace of mind. In fact, the nest of this species may frequently be found by simply watching a male and noting his behaviour towards smaller birds when they approach the immediate locality of a bush or hedgerow wherein his mate is brooding. He will not tolerate trespassers, and such are his courage and ferocity that he will, sometimes, not hesitate to attack even a man in defence of his offspring. More than once during my wanderings I have been struck on the head by a Shrike when he considered his young ones were in imminent danger.

The widely used alternative name of Butcher Bird no doubt had its origin in the creature's curious habit of spitting small birds, mice, and beetles upon thorn bushes, and then tearing them to pieces when required for food. Near the nest figured in the accompanying coloured plate was a larder with the remains of a blue tit hanging in it. Besides killing small birds for their own consumption they sometimes feed their chicks upon them. One morning, when I visited a nest containing nearly full-grown young Shrikes, I observed



RED-BACKED SHRIKE ON ITS NEST.

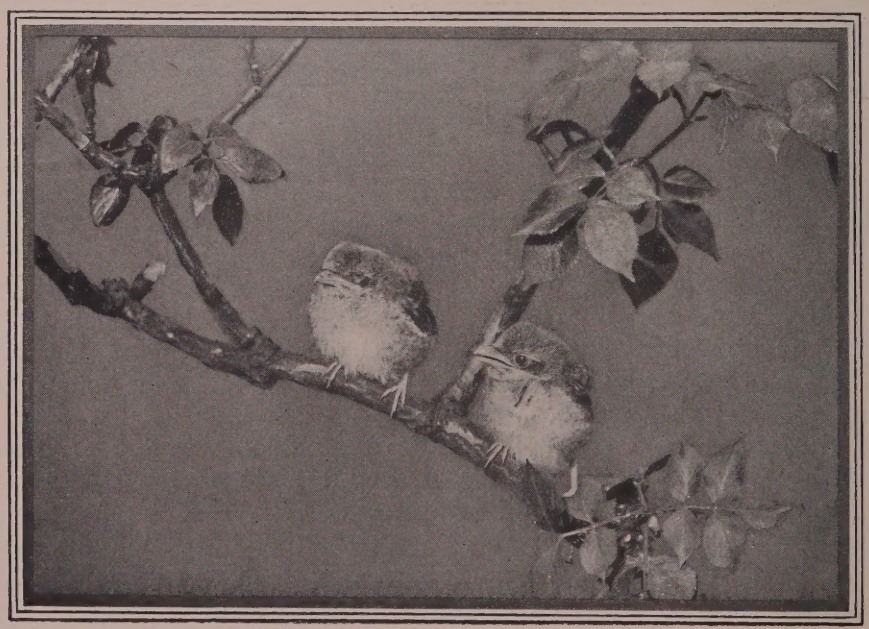
something protruding about an inch from the mouth of one of them. To my surprise I discovered that it was the wing of an adult blue tit. Young Shrikes eject pellets of undigestible food just in the manner common to hawks and owls.

Although the male bird of this species is such a dour, unlovable creature when judged from a human standpoint, he makes an ideal lover and a good husband. During the days of courtship he is true to the universal traditions of his sex in making himself look thoroughly ridiculous, and throughout the time of wedded bliss is most kind and attentive to his mate.

The members of this species build large nests of slender twigs, honeysuckle stems, rootlets, dead grass, moss, wool, and hair, in isolated thorn bushes, hedges, woods, and rough commons in most parts of England, with the exception of the extreme north and west, where it is less frequent.

The eggs number from four to six, and are liable to great variation both in regard to ground colour and markings, hence the species exercises a great fascination over egg collectors who make varieties a speciality. Sometimes the ground colour is white, and at others pale buff, pale green, or salmon coloured, spotted, blotched, and freckled with pale brown, violet, grey, or reddish brown. Generally the markings form a zone round the larger end. I have seen a show case with something like fifty clutches in it, no two of which were alike.

This bird does not, as a rule, arrive in its summer haunts until the month of May, and departs again for Africa in August and September.



The Mole.

"Its appetite is appalling."

THE COMMON MOLE

THE Common Mole is one of the most wonderful animals alive. If you stroke it from head to tail it is all right, and if you reverse the process and stroke it from tail to head it is equally so, because upon occasion it has to progress both ways in its burrows, and its fur is specially adapted to the creature's mode of existence. Moulting, or casting, of the old coat appears to take place from the head and tail in equal proportions, and in June a saddle of old fur may frequently be seen still clinging, as shown in our photogravure, to the back of the animal.

The strength of a Mole is enormous, and, as might be expected in a creature with such a lavish expenditure of energy, its appetite is appalling. It can consume its own weight of food in twenty-four hours, and cannot in the adult stage live for more than twelve without sustenance.

A great deal of misapprehension seems to exist in regard to the life and habits of this quadruped. For instance, many people imagine that when a Mole is engaged in throwing up a hillock of earth it is working after worms. If this were its only method of catching them starvation would overtake the unfortunate beast in a week. Worms are easily scared, and the majority of them make haste, as every working gardener knows, to leave earth where any kind of vibratory disturbance is taking place. I have frequently seen them hurry to the surface where a Mole has been working, and birds aware of this fact wait and devour them.

When burrows have been excavated, Moles make periodical rounds of them in order to pick up worms, beetles, and other creatures that may have dropped

into these subterranean passages, and in this way maintain themselves. Although a Mole may keep one particular

YOUNG MOLES IN NEST.

piece of ground for himself, his mate, or young, the runs that connect one field with another or communicate with water are regarded as common property.

In making a burrow it is not always necessary—and especially so in fairly loose earth—to throw up a hillock. It has been said that the Mole's movements are so quick that he can " swim through the earth." This is, of course, a poetical exaggeration. I have on more than one occasion torn the earth up after the animal and overtaken it with ease.

There are one or two interesting questions that need an answer in regard to this wonderful creature's economy. For instance, how does a Mole subsist during frosty weather, when worms retire to a considerable depth and lie curled up in a more or less dormant condition ? It has been stated that the animal makes store-chambers and places in them worms which it has disabled. Incredible as this may appear, I am inclined to think there is some germ of truth in it. On one occasion I placed a dog Mole inside a large washing tin containing mould only an inch deep in order that I might watch his actions without difficulty. He fed upon worms until he was completely satiated, and then bit the heads and tails of those he was unable to consume and stored them all in one place in his prison yard and covered them with mould.

Moles make large nests of dry grass and bring forth four or five young ones at a litter. A nesting hillock may always be distinguished even at a distance by its larger size.

Great Black-backed Gull at Home.

"The young do not attain full plumage until they are about five years of age."

THE GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL

THE Great Black Back—or Cob as it is called in some parts of England—is the largest Gull found breeding in the British Islands. Its length is about thirty inches and from tip to tip its outstretched wings measure nearly six feet. It may always be distinguished with certainty from its smaller yet more numerous relative, the Lesser Black-Backed Gull, by the fact that it has flesh-coloured legs and feet, whereas those of its congener are yellow.

The Great Black-Backed Gull, although found scattered all round our coast in winter, breeds much more numerously in Scotland and Ireland than in England or Wales, where only a few pairs are to be met with.

It lives upon dead fish left stranded by the tide, young birds, eggs, dead lambs, and all kinds of carrion. I have watched it do almost incredible things in the way of swallowing young birds, and killing sickly puffins in the sea, and do not wonder that the Highland gamekeeper is its sworn enemy. If the naturalist finds and examines the nest of a wild goose, or other defenceless bird breeding in the heather, he may cover the eggs up ever so carefully, but if he is within sight of a Cob that nest is almost certain to be robbed directly he has turned his back upon it.

As an illustration of the intelligence and cunning of the Great Black-Backed Gull I will relate an experience which I had some years ago. Two or three pairs were nesting on a small rocky island in a fresh-water loch in the Highlands where our full-page photogravure was obtained. I induced a keeper who accompanied me to the place to help me to build a hide-up of sallow bushes. When this was completed and I had been duly installed with my apparatus, the keeper rowed away and left me. After much waiting I secured a number of pictures, but as the birds were somewhat small on my plates, on account

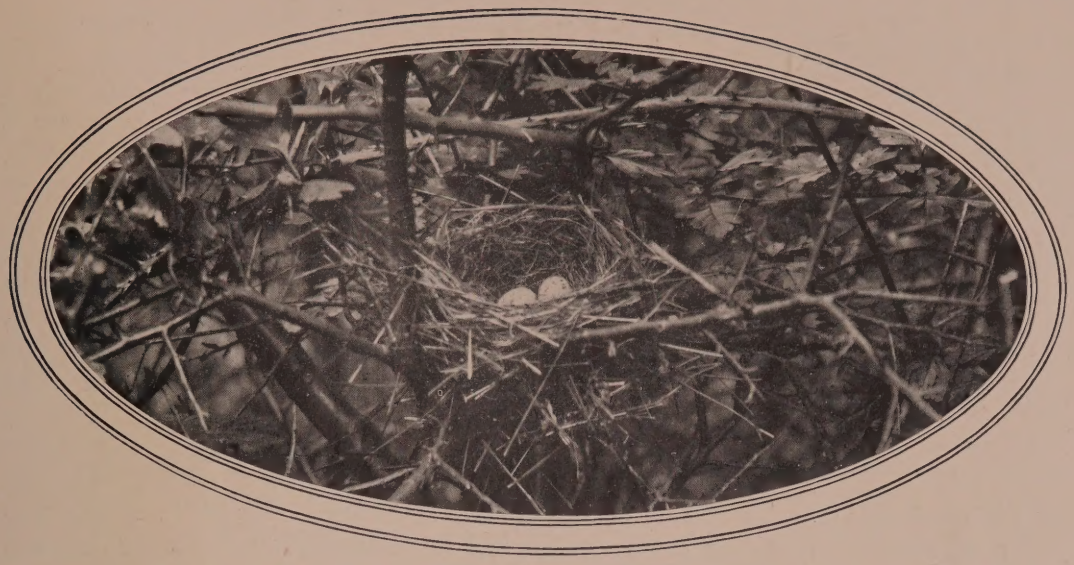
THE GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL.

of the distance I was away from the rock upon which they alighted, I returned to the fray a day or two afterwards. On this occasion I was accompanied by a different keeper, who helped me to move my hiding contrivance a few feet nearer to the rock. After I had been carefully hidden my companion went away to fish for trout on the loch. Although I waited long and patiently, and could hear the Gulls uttering their alarm notes high overhead, they would not come down, and I was at last reluctantly compelled to acknowledge defeat, crawl out of my place of hiding, and hail the keeper. On our way home I remarked that the behaviour of the birds had completely puzzled me. Seeing that they had been fairly bold during my first visit, and had had time in which to grow familiar with my hiding contrivance, I could not understand why they had grown shyer instead of bolder.

"Ah, well," remarked my companion, "the explanation is probably to be sought in the fact that I shot at the Gulls about a week ago; they could see me fishing on the loch whilst you were waiting, would remember me, and, no doubt, feared another attack." And that in all probability was a correct solution of the problem.

The Great Black Back makes a large, slovenly nest of seaweed, heather, dead grass, and bits of wool. The eggs generally number three, although only two are sometimes met with It is said that the young do not obtain full plumage until they are about five years of age.

Lesser Whitethroat at Nest.



"The nest is composed of dead grass and stalks."

THE LESSER WHITETHROAT

TO all but the initiated in ornithology this bird is likely to be passed by, or confused with its more numerous cousin, the Greater or Common Whitethroat. In order, therefore, to help the student to distinguish it, I will mention one or two points wherein it differs from the last-named species. It is, as its name implies, smaller, measuring only from five to five and a quarter inches in length, whereas its congener is about five and a half inches long from the tip of the bill to the end of the tail. It has darker ear coverts, and especially so in the case of the male; the dusky wing and tail feathers are edged with greyish-brown, whereas in the case of the Greater Whitethroat these quills are bordered with chestnut. The species under notice generally builds in a higher situation, and lays smaller eggs, which are white or creamy white in ground colour, with a very faint tinge of green, and somewhat boldly spotted and speckled, especially at the larger end, with greenish-brown and ash grey.

The nest is composed of dead grass stalks, with an inner lining of horsehair, and is sometimes bound together by means of cobwebs.

The specimen figured in our photogravure nested about four feet from the ground in an old hedgerow running parallel with a well-used footpath, and almost overgrown with brambles. Within a dozen yards of her a Common or Greater Whitethroat sat covering a brood of tiny chicks, and, contrary to expectation, the smaller bird proved to be much bolder in confronting the camera. At first she would tolerate the apparatus, but not the photographer, and whenever I approached to expose a plate she quietly slipped off the nest and scolded me vehemently in harsh, angry notes from the darkest depths of the straggling overgrown hedgerow. The male bird fed her as she sat upon the

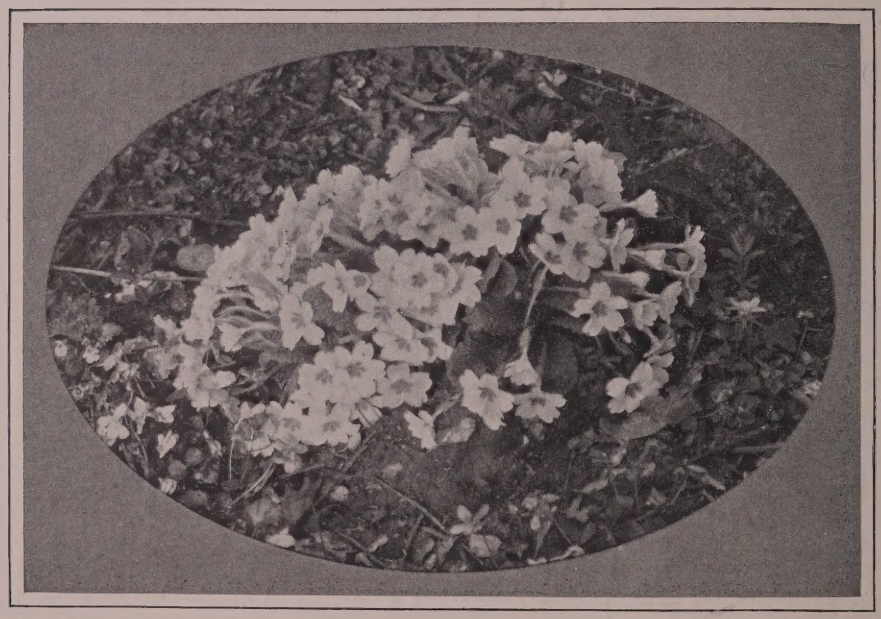
LESSER WHITETHROAT FEEDING ITS YOUNG.

nest, and if I happened to disturb these very pretty meetings he became exceedingly angry and protested even more loudly and boldly than his mate.

A pair of birds of this species has bred for years in succession at the same spot in a Surrey hedgerow near my home.

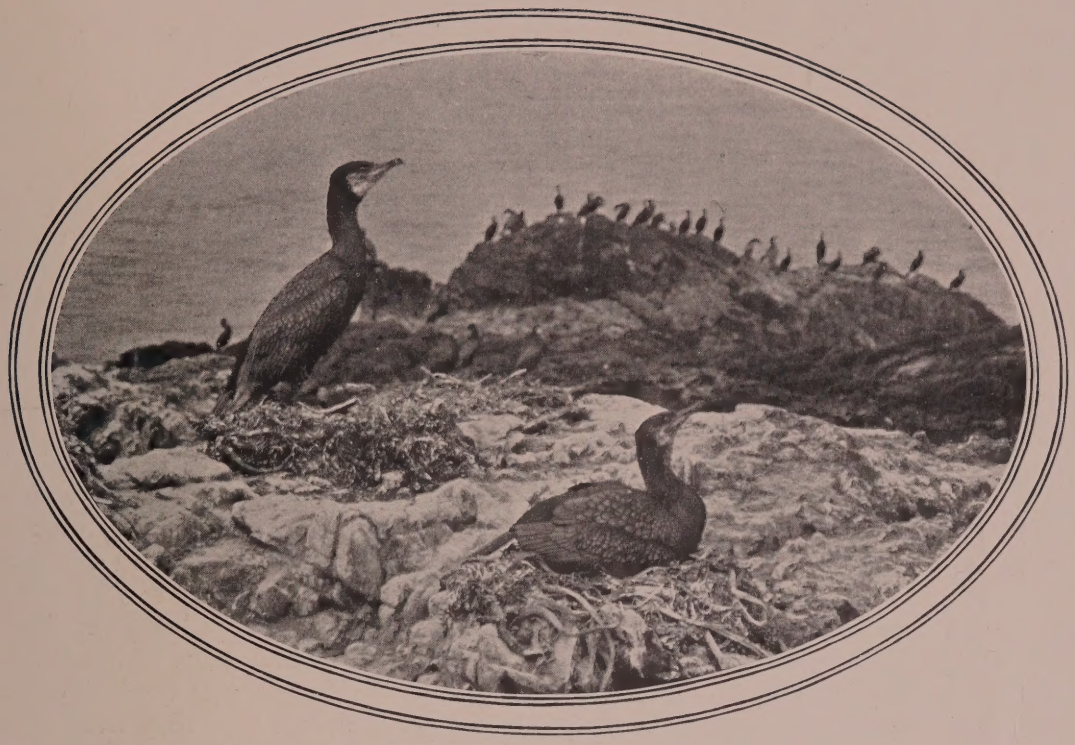
The Lesser Whitethroat, although a graceful and interesting bird, is not a very accomplished vocalist; the male, however, tries with a will to make up any deficiencies in quality by a prodigal liberality in quantity. I have known instances when he appeared to sing almost incessantly the whole day long. He also remains in song later in the summer than his better-known relative.

This species arrives upon our shores in April and departs again for its winter abode in Africa during September, stragglers occasionally tarrying until October.



CORMORANTS

"The nest is generally a bulky structure composed of sticks, twigs, seaweed, turf, and coarse grass."



"A Cormorant's breeding colony is not exactly a pleasant place to visit."

THE COMMON CORMORANT

THIS bird has an exceedingly wide geographical distribution, for it is found all over Europe, in Asia, Northern Africa, and on the Atlantic shores of North America. It may be easily distinguished from its near relative the Green Cormorant, or Shag, by its greater size, and the absence of green from the colour of its plumage.

It feeds upon fishes, which it pursues under water, and can catch with equal ease and dexterity in river, lake, or sea. When captured young it is easily tamed, and for generations Chinese and Japanese fishermen have taken advantage of this fact, and made use of the bird's services in obtaining a livelihood. A leather strap or ring is placed round the Cormorant's neck, in such a way as to allow it to breathe freely, but yet prevent it from swallowing its prey. The bird is then taken out to the fishing grounds on a raft and released. After it has dived a number of times and obtained a little rest between each capture, as it does in a natural state, its Oriental master removes the ring or strap and allows his feathered assistant to do a little fishing on its own account.

Cormorants are very fond of standing on a post in the water, or upon some dead tree stump overhanging it, also of basking with outspread wings on an ocean rock, and when a group of birds is seen standing in a row thus engaged the sight is a very curious one indeed.

This species breeds generally round

CORMORANT'S NEST AND EGGS.

our coast wherever suitable accommodation can be found on ledges of maritime cliffs, low rocky islands, such as the Farnes off the coast of Northumberland, in trees growing upon islands in inland lakes, and even amongst long grass where no trees grow. . The nest is generally a bulky structure composed of sticks, twigs, seaweed, turf, and coarse grass. Building operations commence in April, but when visiting a large colony as late as the middle of July I have seen some birds still busy bringing seaweed, and others sitting on fresh eggs, whilst their earlier friends had fast-feathering young ones wandering about the island. The eggs, numbering from three to six, are pale blue in colour when the coating of chalk has been scraped away and the true shell revealed.

Young Cormorants when newly hatched are of a bluish-black colour, and without a particle of down upon their shiny nigger-like little bodies.

A Cormorant's breeding colony is not exactly a pleasant place to visit, especially late in the season, for the offensive stench from droppings and decomposing fish is well nigh unendurable.

During my last visit to the principal Farne Islands Cormorant station—which is so low that occasionally every nest is washed away by a high tide and a strong north-easterly breeze—I saw several common guillemots' eggs lying about on the rock. They had been so much befouled by the droppings of the legitimate owners of the place that they were only recognisable by their shape.

Young Cormorants are excessively nervous, and upon the approach of a visitor disgorge their last meal and tremble all over in the most violent and distressing manner.

A Hedgehog Family.

"When quite young they are unable to roll up into a ball of defence."

THE HEDGEHOG, OR URCHIN

THIS familiar quadruped is too well known to need any kind of description, and I shall therefore content myself by mentioning a few interesting facts relative to its life and habits.

It is a nocturnal animal, sleeping by day, and coming forth towards evening to ramble about during the hours of darkness in search of beetles, worms, birds' eggs, young frogs, snakes, or whatsoever its strength and skill will allow it to overpower and slay. It is common nearly all over Europe, and hibernates during the winter months. In the autumn it makes for itself a nice warm nest of moss, dead grass and leaves, and, curling itself up, lapses into a more or less torpid condition. I say "more or less torpid," because if disturbed during mild weather, even in January, it will take umbrage and forsake its carefully prepared quarters. I have on more than one occasion taken a "Hedgepig" from its nest during cold weather in the winter, and placed it in front of a fire in order to observe at what temperature the animal would awake, and, judging from the accelerated heart-beating, and the convulsive manner in which it breathed, the experiment could not have been good for its health.

A great deal of uncertainty seems to prevail in regard to the precise season at which the Hedgehog brings forth its young. Some authorities contend that the breeding season is in the early summer, and others not until July or August. Personally I have found nests containing young ones as early as the beginning of June, and as late as the end of August. There is also room for a good deal more observation in regard to the number of young Hedgepigs in a litter; some naturalists assert that four is the limit, whilst others mention double that number in a nest. I have never

A VERY YOUNG HEDGEHOG.

seen fewer than three or more than six.

Young Hedgehogs are born with their eyes closed. Their spines are white, as shown in the accompanying picture, and are unable to roll up into a ball of defence. Hedgehogs in a wild, free state seldom utter any kind of sound, but whilst trying to escape from confinement they frequently utter cries, which are difficult to describe, but may be termed something between a grunt and a squeal. Young ones that have missed their mother call to her in a voice highly suggestive of that of a bird.

Although dogs appear to experience considerable difficulty in killing a Hedgehog, foxes and badgers seem to slay it with ease, in spite of its armour.

The animal is said, on the authority of gipsies, who cook it in a somewhat crude and curious manner, to supply good eating. It is rolled up inside a kind of clay dumpling, and when this has been sufficiently baked in a stick fire it is opened; the spines and skin of the Urchin adhere to the hot clay, and the rest, like a kernel, is ready for consumption.

Hedgehogs do not readily take to the water, yet swim with great ease and expedition if thrown into it.

Nestling Merlins.

"The eggs . . . are laid in a slight hollow . . . amongst deep heather."

THE MERLIN

THIS bird claims the distinction of being the smallest member of the Falcon family found breeding in the British Islands. The male is only about the size of a missel thrush, but his courage exceeds even that of the noble peregrine, and he has been known to attack and kill game even twice his own weight.

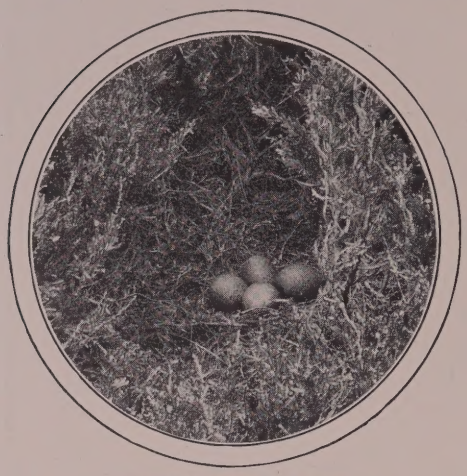
Although remaining with us all the year round, this species is subject to a good deal of local migration, and the individuals seen in the southern counties during the winter retire to the wild moorland parts of Wales, the north of England, Scotland, and Ireland in the spring to breed. It nests quite commonly for its kind on some of the islands in the Outer Hebrides.

The eggs, numbering from three to six, are creamy-white in ground colour, but are generally so thickly marked with reddish brown that the underlying tint is difficult to discover. They are laid in a slight hollow, which sometimes has a meagre lining of bits of dead heather, grass, or moss, amongst deep heather or scattered rocks. Occasionally the old habitation of some tree-building species is occupied, but this departure is more often indulged in on the Continent than in this country.

The Merlin, or Stone Falcon, as it is occasionally called, shows a great affection for a favourite old haunt of its species, and in spite of persecution a

pair will turn up season after season at the same place to breed.

The female sits very closely, and when



MERLIN'S NEST AND EGGS.

disturbed flies in circles high over the head of her disturber, uttering shrill alarm cries, which frequently bring her mate upon the scene. During the period of incubation the male provides the female with all the food she requires. I have frequently watched him bring a small bird to some knoll a hundred yards away from the nest, call his mate to the place, and, whilst she has been engaged in plucking and eating her meal, he has flown to the nest and critically examined the eggs. The male sparrow hawk sometimes does precisely the same kind of thing, but I have never seen one of either species attempt to undertake the task of incubation.

During the period that young Merlins are in down the female does not wander far from the nest, but contents herself by either brooding or waiting on some commanding eminence for the return of the male with prey, which she plucks and divides amongst the members of her voracious family.

One day, whilst waiting for a Merlin to come back to her fast feathering chicks, a violent thunderstorm broke over the hills. When the hail and rain descended in earnest the youngsters appeared to get frightened and began to call out *tway, tway, tway* in the most pathetic tones. This had the desired effect, for the old bird soon faced the ordeal of my lens; but although I secured two or three photographs they were of very little use on account of the miserably wet and bedraggled condition of the bird.

Lapwing on Eggs.

"The nest is a slight hollow scratched in the ground."

THE LAPWING, OR PEEWIT

FEW birds are more useful to the farmer, or of greater interest to the naturalist, than the Lapwing, and yet it is persecuted beyond all reason. In the spring its eggs are persistently gathered and sold as breakfast-table delicacies, and in the winter it is shot and netted for the miserable price its body will fetch in the poulterer's shop. In many parts of the country its numbers are gradually, yet surely, decreasing, to the regret of the agriculturist, who greatly appreciates its services in clearing his land of slugs and all kinds of noxious insects. If early clutches were taken and a close time instituted, as is now the case in some Continental countries, the species would be allowed a chance of maintaining its position in point of numbers, but such persistent collecting goes on in some parts of the country that by the middle of June the old birds have given up all hope of rearing a brood and commenced to flock. Many people think when they see large flocks on flooded meadows in the winter that the species cannot be diminishing in numbers, but they forget that these flocks are largely composed of Continental migrants.

The Lapwing, or Green Plover, as it is frequently called, breeds in nearly all suitable localities, and the love-making notes, drumming flight, and aerial antics of the male are most interesting harbingers of spring. The nest is a slight hollow scratched in the ground and lined with a few dead grass straws, or bits of rushes. In nearly all cases the eggs number four, although late in the season a bird may frequently be found sitting upon three. Very rarely a clutch of five may be met with, and upon two occasions I have found a small stone bearing every evidence of having been added to a clutch of three eggs.

Young Lapwings run directly they leave the egg shells, and if any form of danger should appear they instantly crouch flat upon the ground, and remain absolutely still until a reassuring cry

LAPWING'S NEST AND EGGS.

from one or other of their parents tells them that the danger has passed. The down covering a young Peewit is splendidly adapted for protection, for, in addition to its yellowish fawn ground-colour being broken up by blackish brown markings, a greyish white collar runs round the neck in such a way as, in certain aspects, to break the continuity of the outline of the body, and thus make the bird appear to its enemies as two distinct objects instead of one. A little reflection will show what a wonderful provision of Nature this is for the protection of a defenceless chick.

Even when a young Lapwing is fully clothed in its first coat of feathers, and able to fly a couple of hundred yards, it will trust to its hiding powers, and I must confess to having passed by chicks in positions similar to those shown in the illustration below, having mistaken their appearance for bits of dried cow-dung.

The male Peewit wears a longer crest than the female, and has a shriller voice. Both birds show great courage in defence of their young, and it is sometimes amusing to watch them driving sheep away from the neighbourhood of their nests.

THE NATTERJACK TOAD.

"A bright yellow line running down the centre of its back proclaims its identity."

"Although rarer than the Common Toad or Frog, the Natterjack is more beautiful than either of them."

THE NATTERJACK, OR RUSH TOAD

ALTHOUGH rarer than the Common Toad or Frog, the Natterjack is more beautiful than either of them, if such an adjective can be applied to what Gilbert White would have called "a vile reptile."

It is lighter coloured than its better-known relative, being of a yellowish brown tint, clouded with dull olive. A well-defined bright yellow line running down the centre of the back proclaims its identity with certainty and ease, even to the most casual observer. It has a habit of standing with its body higher than that of the Common Toad, and when moving about on land gets over the ground more quickly.

I have kept it in confinement on several occasions, and as it is a hardy creature capable of sustaining itself in dry places, I have tried to acclimatise it to the Surrey hills, but in vain. Norfolk and other specimens turned loose in the neighbourhood of Caterham Valley, where the Common Toad is abundant, have apparently shared the same fate as edible snails, which I have sent to broad-land, viz., vanished.

Some of my readers may say:—"Exactly what was to be expected, as the Natterjack is a creature of ditches, ponds, and damp places." Not entirely, I submit, for it is to be found amongst the sand dunes at Ravenglass in Cumberland, and Professor Bell, who lived for a time in Gilbert White's old house at Selborne, records that the favourite resort of the Rush Toads inhabiting the famous naturalist's garden was under a shallow layer of turf, covering the top of a wall which was exposed to the summer sun in the hottest part of the garden.

It is said that the Natterjack emits

THE NATTERJACK TOAD.

a smell not unlike the smoke of gunpowder, but although I have handled a good many specimens from time to time I have never noticed this peculiarity.

It does not appear to be either as nervous or sullen as the Common Toad, and will, when in captivity, accept small worms and swallow them with relish much more readily whilst under observation than its better known relative.

The notes of the male sound something like *glouk, glouk,* and can be heard at a great distance, but neither this creature nor the Common Frog can compare, from a musical point of view, with a small relative of theirs which I have heard in the United States. At sundown towards the end of April every marshy place in the country seems to palpitate with the shrill piping music of frogs. In fact they produce such a prodigious and penetrating din that it is almost impossible to listen to any kind of bird notes. Frog music in an American marsh seems to me to take the place of song thrush music in a sheltered English wood about the same time of year. Hardly anything else can be heard.

The eggs of the Natterjack are laid in the water, but its young ones do not occupy the tadpole stage of their existence much longer than from six to seven weeks.

Wryneck at Nesting-hole.

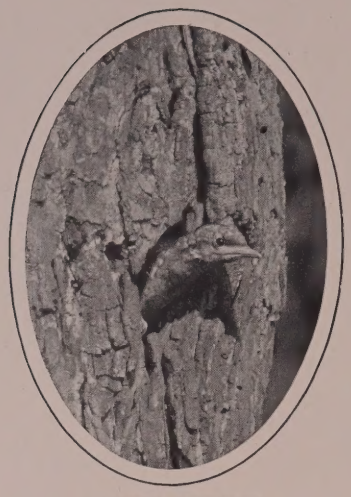
"The Wryneck can run up or down the trunk of a tree with equal ease and expedition."

THE WRYNECK

THE Wryneck, or Cuckoo's Mate, as it is sometimes called, on account of the fact that it arrives upon our shores about the same time as that much-looked-for harbinger of spring, is a very interesting bird. It always makes its presence known "from early morn till dewy eve" by a rather wearisome reiteration of its kestrel-like call notes, *que, que, que,* which are rapidly uttered.

In the distance it looks an ordinary brown sparrow-like bird, but when observed within two or three feet its plumage is seen to consist of the most beautiful admixture of varying shades of brown, buff, grey, and black, the barrings and pencillings producing an effect highly suggestive of a pretty piece of lacework.

It breeds in holes in trees and decaying fence posts, and is very partial to a favourite old haunt, to which it will return season after season in unbroken succession. If a woodpecker's hole, or other accommodation of a like character, cannot be found, the friendly shelter of a nesting box erected in a garden or orchard will be readily adapted. Should a great tit be already in possession,



A YOUNG WRYNECK.

the fact presents no difficulties of a moral or physical character to the aggressive Wryneck, for she simply ejects the rightful owner and her eggs and takes possession. Although this species does not make any kind of nest of its own as a rule, it does not appear to object to the comfortable down-lined home of the bird it has evicted.

Seven or eight pure white unspotted eggs, easily mistaken for those of the lesser spotted woodpecker, are laid, and if any prying intruder should come along whilst the Wryneck is sitting, she resorts to the most astonishing forms of deception. First of all she tries to terrify, by hissing like an angry snake, and if this does not succeed in frightening away the molester of her peace, and she is captured, she will feign serious illness until an opportune moment for escape presents itself, when she suddenly darts away from her captor.

A large proportion of the food of the Wryneck consists of ants and their eggs, for the capture of which the bird has been bountifully provided by Nature. Its tongue, which is long and worm-like, is supplied with a sticky secretion to which the insects adhere until they have been withdrawn between the mandibles of their captor. The individual figured in the accompanying plate will be seen to have a large number of ants in its bill, if the illustration be examined with a magnifier.

Having two toes in front, and two behind, the Wryneck can run up or down the trunk of a tree with equal ease and expedition. On the ground it progresses by means of short, quick hops.

This bird is commonest in the south and south-east of England. It is a migrant arriving in April and leaving again during September.

Lesser Tern.

"The favourite breeding haunts of the Lesser Tern are on sandy flat coasts."

THE LESSER TERN

THIS bird is the smallest of the sea swallows resorting to the British Archipelago to breed. It only measures between eight and nine inches in length, although it looks longer when on the wing. It may easily be distinguished from its congeners, the Common and Arctic Terns, by its smaller size, and the fact that it has a white patch on the forehead just above the base of the bill. The practised ornithologist can also readily recognise it by the difference in the sound of its call notes. It is not so numerous as either of the above-mentioned species, and in the breeding season is more frequently met with in companies consisting of a few pairs than in large colonies.

The favourite breeding haunts of the Lesser Tern are on sandy flat coasts, interspersed with banks of shells and small shingle. It sometimes nests on the shores of large bodies of fresh water, such as Loch Lomond, but this is more commonly the case on the Continent than in this country. For some unknown reason the bird exhibits considerable fickleness in regard to its breeding ground. One season a small number of pairs may arrive, and the next a comparatively large colony, without any apparent reason for the change.

Very little in the way of nest-building is attempted. Sometimes a slight hollow is made in the sand and lined with small shells, and at others the eggs are laid upon the sand or shingle, without any discernible attempt on the part of the

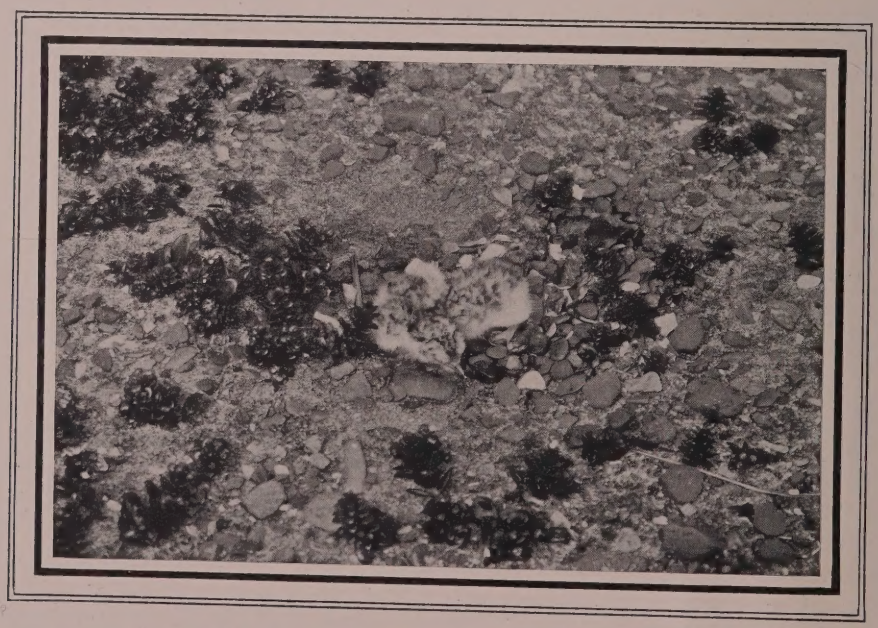
LESSER TERN'S EGGS.

bird to create a hollow for their reception. The eggs generally number two or three, although as many as four may be met with. They vary from pale brown to stone yellow in ground colour, and are marked with grey and dark chestnut-brown spots and blotches.

At Ravenglass, in Cumberland, where our photographs were taken, the watcher has an ingenious method of circumventing the collector by marking every Lesser Tern's egg he finds with an indelible ink pencil. When my friend, Mr. Jasper Atkinson, of Leeds, showed me a clutch of eggs streaked and scrawled over I was bewildered until the reason was explained to me.

During dry windy weather this species must sometimes suffer calamity in the laying season from a curious source. Whilst waiting to take the photograph from which the accompanying photogravure was reproduced, I noticed that if the Tern remained away from her eggs for a little while the drifting sand almost covered them over, and she was compelled to remove it before sitting down to incubate them. When the wind was blowing its hardest she sat with her bill pointing straight in the direction from which it came, and, with half-closed eyes, patiently endured the inconvenience, occasionally shaking the fine sand from her plumage.

Young Lesser Terns harmonise with their natural surroundings in the most wonderful manner, and as they have a habit of clapping flat upon the sand or shingle, and keeping quite still when their parents sound the first alarm note, they are very difficult to find.



Ptarmigan on Nest.

"Snow wreaths, many feet deep, still lingered."

THE PTARMIGAN

THE Ptarmigan is essentially a bird of mountain and mist. It represents the dreary solitudes of Nature where silence is almost eternal. So far as our islands are concerned the species is only found north of the Tweed. Its sober coat of mixed greys and browns harmonises so perfectly with the natural surroundings of the creature that it can scarcely be detected even when crouching at one's feet. As if conscious of this advantage the bird will often allow the wayfarer to pass it within a few paces without stirring.

I remember on one occasion, with a friend, climbing a mountain nearly four thousand feet in height for photographs of this species at home. In order to enjoy the advantage of the cool hours wherein to climb with our weighty apparatus, we started out at midnight. About 4 a.m. we reached the elevation at which snow-wreaths, many feet deep, still lingered, although it was close upon midsummer. My friend took me to a Ptarmigan's nest which he had found a few days previously, but as I was somewhat fastidious about figuring a bird in a situation I considered more typical of the species, we wandered along the mountain side to another of which he had knowledge. Alas! the hoody crows or herring gulls, both of which were breeding at a lower elevation,

PTARMIGAN'S NEST AND EGGS.

had sucked the eggs. By dint of much searching we found another nest close by a huge patch of unmelted snow, but its owner was unusually wild, and would not tolerate the camera within a gunshot of her. Taking stretch after stretch of likely ground we beat each one carefully, but although we frequently put up birds that flew away uttering their melancholy croaking notes, we only found empty nests with egg-shells scattered round them, and were at last compelled to retrace our steps and devote our attention to the first seen bird. Luckily she proved a good sitter, in a double sense of the term, and we exposed plates upon her from every possible point of view.

As an illustration of the difficulties of detecting a bird of this species on her nest, and the closeness with which she will sit when on the point of hatching, I have heard of an ornithologist who had sought hard and long in vain. Whilst sitting upon a stone eating his luncheon he happened to look down, and was astonished to discover that the crumbs from his sandwich were falling upon the back of a Ptarmigan on her eggs between his feet!

This species lays from seven to ten, and sometimes as many as twelve, eggs, of a pale reddish or greyish-white ground colour, blotched and spotted with reddish-brown markings.

When the female is disturbed whilst covering her chicks she flutters round and round the intruder, feigning injury, and in an instant the young ones have scattered north, south, east, and west, and vanished as completely as if the earth had suddenly opened and swallowed them up.

YOUNG HOODY CROWS

"They frequently try over their far-heard notes."

"The Hoody breeds in maritime cliffs."

THE HOODY, OR GREY CROW

THIS bird is chiefly known in England through Continental specimens that arrive on the East Coast in October, and scatter themselves over the countryside to spend the winter searching for any kind of food that our less rigorous climate may afford them. I have never met with it breeding in either England or Wales, although in Ireland, the Isle of Man, and parts of Scotland it practically takes the place of the Carrion or Black Crow.

Where these two winged scavengers meet in their geographical range, both in the United Kingdom and on the Continent, they will interbreed. Taking this fact, their structural identity, and similarity of habits into consideration, many naturalists regard the Hoody only as a variety of the Carrion Crow, and not entitled, therefore, to any kind of specific distinction.

The beak and legs of the Royston Crow — as the Hoody is sometimes called — are jet black; head, throat, wings, and tail shining blue-black; whilst the nape, back, and underparts are of a dark slaty-grey colour. Whether in flight or at rest its bold parti-colours render it easily distinguishable, almost at any distance.

I have generally found that the Hoody

HOODY CROW'S NEST.

breeds in maritime cliffs, or in deep heather on the ground; but my friend, Mr. Richard Ussher, who has given it a great deal of attention in Ireland, says that he has never found its nest in the latter situation. The structure is made of sticks, twigs, heather, dry seaweed, rootlets, moss, hair, and wool.

The eggs generally number five, of a greyish-green ground colour, spotted and blotched with olive or greenish-brown markings of varying shades.

When the young ones first leave the nest they sit about in trees, or upon rocks, and frequently try over their far-heard notes, as shown in our coloured plate, and especially when they see their parents flying high overhead.

The Hoody Crow feeds upon beetles, worms, birds' eggs, and young, all kinds of carrion, and shell-fish; in the opening of the latter it shows great astuteness. As far back as the twelfth century Giraldus Cambrensis mentioned that this bird had a habit of taking shell-fish up into the air and letting them drop on rocks in order that they might be broken. This interesting habit is still practised all round our coast during the winter, and I have noticed that if the first fall does not accomplish the bird's purpose it takes the shell-fish higher and higher until the desired end is accomplished.

Snipes Covering Young.

"The nest consists of a few blades of dead grass placed in a hollow under an overhanging tussock of coarse grass."

THE COMMON SNIPE

THIS well-known bird breeds in almost every suitable quarter of the British Islands, and during the winter months its ranks are greatly swollen by the arrival of vast numbers of migrants from Scandinavia. Its swift, zigzag flight renders it of peculiar interest to the sportsman, and the weird bleating, or drumming, made by the male in the breeding season, to the naturalist. Although the latter peculiarity has been closely observed, and widely discussed by able ornithologists for more than a century, opinions still differ as to how the sound is produced. Some contend that it is of vocal origin, and others that it is made by the tail or wings.

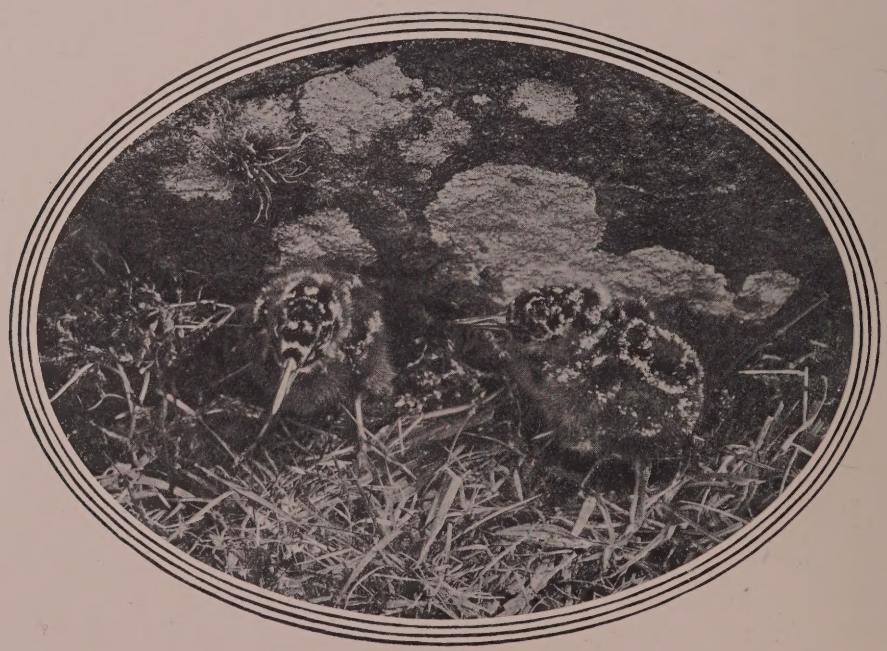
When a Snipe is going to indulge in a drumming exercise, which is generally during the cool hours of dusk—although individual birds occasionally do so in the sunshine of broad noontide—he rises into the air to some considerable height uttering his familiar and far sounding *tjick, tjick, tjick* notes. Upon reaching a suitable altitude he descends in a slanting direction with outspread wings and tail, and it is then that the bleating or drumming sound is produced. Numerous observations through powerful field-glasses have convinced me that the sound is not of vocal origin, for the bill is always closed whilst the bird is descending. The wings undoubtedly have a great deal to do with the production of the sound, but how far they are assisted by the tail quills I am not prepared to say.

The Common Snipe will readily perch on stone walls, gates, rails, and sometimes even on the tops of tall trees. Its bill is a wonderful organ, being crowded with nerves right down to its very tip. It is more sensitive to touch than the human finger, and thus enables its owner to find worms, and other edible trifles, hidden in soft mud.

SNIPE'S NEST.

In open seasons nests belonging to this species may be found as early as March, and on one occasion I met with one containing fresh eggs as late as the end of July. The nest consists of a few blades of dead grass, or bits of rush, placed in a hollow under an overhanging tussock of coarse grass, or in a bunch of rushes on swampy marsh-land. The four pyriform eggs are olive green to greyish yellow in ground colour, boldly marked with varying shades of brown and grey. The young ones commence to run about directly after they are hatched.

One cold May morning I quite accidentally came upon the two chicks figured in the picture at the foot of this page. Seeing that they were unable to travel very far on account of the rough character of the ground and their chilled condition, I erected a hiding tent, which a boy was carrying for me at the time, retired inside with my camera, and speedily exposed a number of plates upon their mother in the act of brooding them. Presently a long bill was nervously thrust through the rushes behind the crouching bird and instantly disappeared again. This was repeated at intervals of about a minute for quite a while, then the head of the male appeared, and finally he came forth into the open with a small piece of food of some kind between his long mandibles. This was given to one of the chicks, and afterwards male and female each brooded a member of their small family, and I photographed them in the act.



The Common Trout.

Trout-tickling.

THE COMMON TROUT

THE Common Trout is a fascinating fish, whether we regard it from the naturalist's point of view, or from that of the angler. My early history is inextricably mixed up with its life and haunts, for when I was a boy nothing could keep me away from the becks of my native county. I have tickled it in brawling beck and sluggish stream, and angled it with every known form of rod, from an ash sapling to a split cane.

The ways of the Trout are past finding out. One day it will be as sulky as a donkey, and the next as playful as a kitten. It is as fickle as fortune, and as courageous as a lion. On some days it will feed like a gourmand, and upon others, that appear to human judgment equally suitable, it will fast like a soul-mortifying saint.

The diversity of food indulged in by this fish is nothing less than astonishing. I have caught it with a mouse in its mouth, and bullheads, loaches, and even members of its own species are included in its dietary. Indeed, old Trout are very liable to develop cannibalistic habits in preference to obtaining a livelihood by catching small flies, larvæ, and worms.

In the autumn the majority of Trout old enough to propagate their species migrate up stream in search of suitable breeding quarters. A sluggish tributary with a sandy or gravelly

bottom and an equable temperature is an ideal haunt for spawning purposes.

MAY-FLIES.

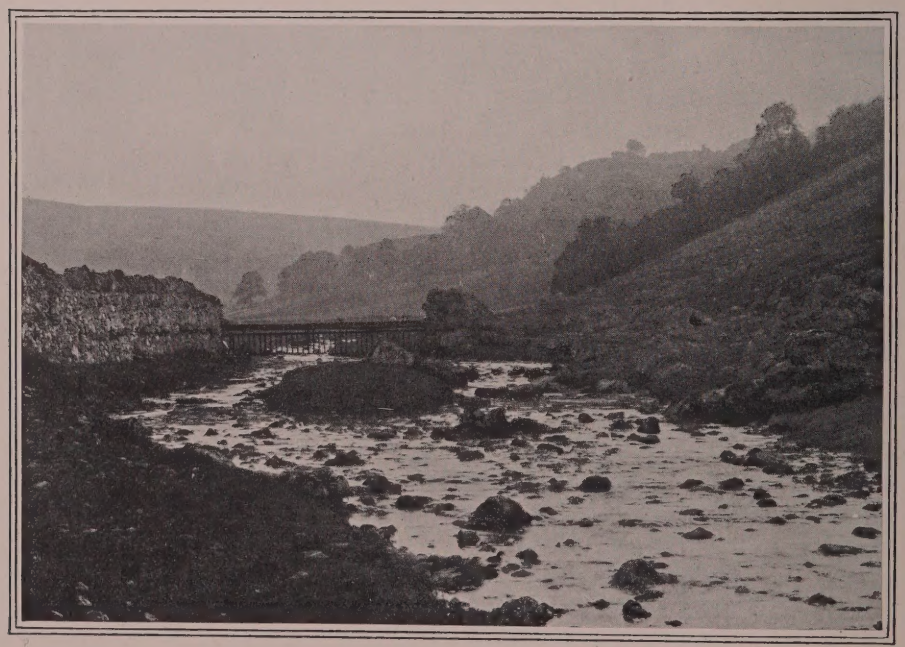
When the spawning has been accomplished, males and females alike descend again to deeper waters. In due season the young Trout are hatched and remain in the quiet-flowing waters until they have grown strong enough and wise enough to descend the rivers and enter a world of subtle enemies.

To the spawning grounds the Trout's two great enemies—the otter and the heron—hie in October. This is taking an unfair advantage, but Nature is not a great moralist. When moving about in shallow places spawning Trout may frequently be seen with their backs out of water, and at such times are occasionally carried off even by the water-hating cat or stealthy owl.

At this season of the year the fish is more easily attracted by artificial light than at any other, according to my experience, and with a bull's-eye lantern and a landing net I have caught it wholesale for friends interested in artificial breeding and rearing.

Our photogravure has been reproduced from a photograph taken in a clear shallow Westmorland stream with an almost imperceptible current.

The Common Trout varies in size, coloration, and flavour, according to the character of the soil through which the river wherein it lives flows. In some streams it never weighs more than a few ounces, whilst in others of the same size and in the same neighbourhood it will attain to a weight of several pounds.



Black-Headed Gull.

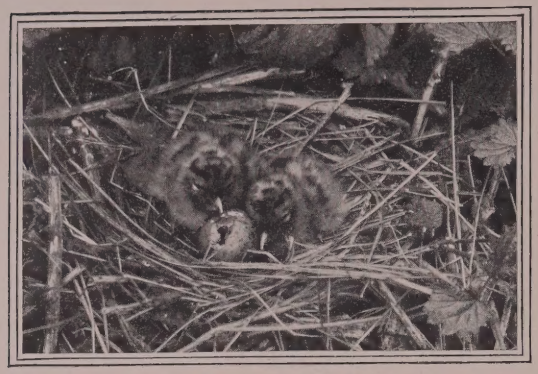
"A young Black-Headed Gull in its first coat of feathers."

THE BLACK-HEADED GULL

THE Black-Headed Gull is a familiar bird, even to those who have seldom or never visited the sea, for, in addition to being exceedingly common, it penetrates the remotest parts of the country in search of food or breeding quarters.

In the spring time, when the birds assume their nuptial black or very dark-brown head-dress, which is brought about by a change of colour and not of feathers, they leave most of our tidal rivers, and betake themselves to their favourite breeding haunts on the edges of meres and tarns. Boggy, wet places are by no means essential, however, to the well-being of their eggs and chicks, for at Ravenglass, in Cumberland, where our photographs were taken, Black-Headed Gulls breed in vast numbers on sand-dunes, with the sea on one side and tidal rivers on the other. Although a gregarious species, I have on several occasions met with a solitary pair breeding on some small mountain tarn. At Scoulton Mere, in Norfolk, great numbers of this species have bred for over three hundred years in unbroken succession, and at Pallisbourne, in Northumberland, there is a very old Gullery.

The Black-Headed Gull commences to breed in April, and makes a rough nest of sedges, rushes, reeds, bits of dead heather, or grass, on the ground amongst



YOUNG BLACK-HEADED GULLS.

tufts of rushes, tussocks of grass, nettles, or heather, and lays two—generally three, and occasionally four—eggs. These vary from pale olive green to light umber brown in ground colour, and are blotched, spotted, and streaked with blackish brown and dark grey. The young commence to run about or swim—if there is water near—directly they are hatched, and it is a mystery how the parent birds find their own chicks in the hungry crowd when they return home with food.

It will be seen in our illustration how widely a young Black-Headed Gull in its first coat of feathers differs from its parents in appearance.

A peculiar thing noticeable at Black-Headed Gulleries in June is that a young bird of this species may be able to fly quite well before it has been fed, but not afterwards, until the food has been disgorged or digested. Apparently conscious of this fact, a young Gull falling into danger soon after a meal will disgorge the food and, taking wing, fly away.

Like other defenceless birds, this Gull has many enemies. At Ravenglass jackdaws breed in rabbits' burrows and prey upon its eggs, and peregrines come down from the mountains to snatch up its feathered young ones.

This charming Gull has endeared itself to Londoners by regularly visiting the Thames above bridge every winter since the rigorous weather of 1895. It is a great friend and benefactor of the farmer, whose land it clears of noxious grubs; but is said to be an enemy of the fisherman on account of its destruction of fry.

THE SHORT-EARED OWL.

"She was at first very shy of the lens."

"The young vary very much in size."

THE SHORT-EARED OWL

A FEW pairs of birds of this species breed on the marshes in East Anglia, and in the heather in the North of England, Scotland, and the Orkneys every spring; but by far the greater number seen in this country during the winter months are migrants from the Continent. It is a bird with a very wide geographical distribution, being found in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, with very little difference in its appearance or habits in any of them.

It is called by sportsmen the Woodcock Owl, on account of the fact that its arrival in numbers upon our shores synchronises with that of the bird beloved by every devotee of the shot gun. It is frequently seen in small companies by sportsmen when out partridge or snipe shooting.

A very interesting thing in regard to this species is that during the recent great vole plagues that have afflicted the Lowlands of Scotland, numbers of Short-eared Owls have congregated in order to take advantage of the plentiful supply of food, just as they did in the sixteenth century when "a sore plague of strange mice" visited Kent and Essex. Another remarkable fact in this connection is that when they enjoy their natural food in such lavish plenitude they breed earlier in the season, and their fecundity is greatly increased. Normally this species lays from three to five eggs—although upon occasion I have seen as many as seven in a nest—and breeds in April and May; but Mr. Richard Bell records that, during the great vole plague of 1890-93 in Scotland, one of his shepherds found a nest containing twelve eggs on February 29th.

NEST OF THE SHORT-EARED OWL.

The ground was covered with snow at the time, and no fewer than seventeen dead voles were lying round the sitting female. These had been brought by the male bird for his mate. Long ago the Short-eared Owl was reported to lay as many as ten or twelve eggs in the fur countries, but the statement was received with incredulity by ornithologists.

The nest is a slight hollow scratched in the ground, and lined with a few bits of dead grass or moss. I have on more than one occasion, however, seen the white oval-shaped eggs lying upon the bare earth.

The young vary very much in size, as may be seen from the illustration on the previous page. They leave the nest long before they are able to fly, and crouch amongst heather, rushes, or other vegetation affording cover.

Our coloured plate of an adult bird on her eggs was obtained on the edge of a Hebridean loch. She was a very shy specimen, and uttered a shrill cry of anger whenever her nest was approached. My lens appeared to be an object of special mistrust, and she always sat with her beautiful eyes steadily fixed upon it.

This species hunts in broad light of day without any apparent inconvenience, and when seen working a moor in search of prey the bird's erratic flight suggests a piece of brown paper being carried hither and thither by a fickle wind.

Oyster-Catcher at Home.

"The Oyster Catcher is a handsome bird."

THE OYSTER CATCHER

WHETHER seen upon the wing, or standing in solemn meditation where the waves ripple along the shores of some far-stretching sandy bay, the Oyster Catcher is a handsome bird. Its well defined black and white plumage renders it conspicuous almost anywhere, and the dullest student of Nature can never forget the bird's loud clear voice once it has been heard.

Whilst staying on the Farne Islands, and at other places where this species breeds, I have heard the birds uttering their clamorous chatter in chorus during every hour of the night.

It lives upon all kinds of mollusca, and is particularly dexterous in detaching limpets from their native rocks with its wedge-like orange-coloured bill.

The Oyster Catcher breeds generally round our coasts where suitable localities are to be found, and in Scotland on the banks of rivers and lochs, often at a considerable distance from the sea. Sometimes quite a number of pebbles and shells are collected wherewith to line the nest, and at others the eggs may be found on shingle, sand, or even bare rock, with little or nothing in the shape of a lining to the slight hollow selected for their reception. In the Shetlands I have found the bird breeding upon a most unlikely ledge of rock some ten feet above the shore, and at the Farne Islands young ones have been hatched for years in succession on the top of an old wall seven or eight feet in

OYSTER CATCHER'S NEST.

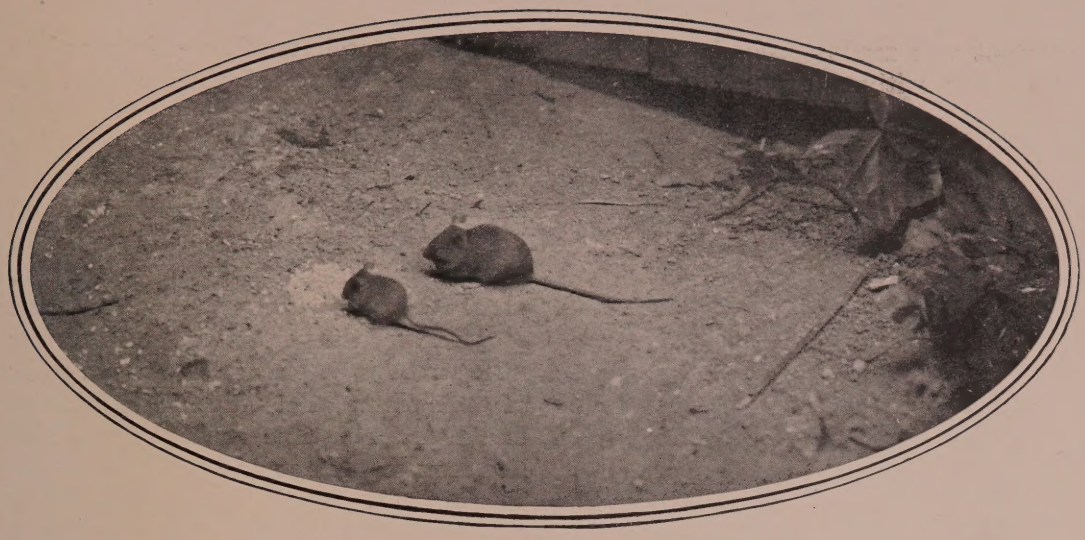
height. I am also aware of the same nest being used year after year in the Outer Hebrides. Although the Oyster Catcher is a very sagacious bird, and generally lays her eggs well above high-water mark, on rare occasions she is caught napping, and her little declivity in the sand or shingle is inundated by a high tide.

Whilst waiting to secure the photograph from which our plate has been made I learnt that the male bird takes his share in the work of incubation. When his turn to sit upon the eggs came he was very mistrustful of the lens staring from the walls of my improvised stone house, and instead of walking on to the nest, he strode solemnly round and round, turning over small stones with his bill, picking up pebbles and showing every sign of anger.

The eggs generally number three, although sometimes two, and occasionally four, are found. They are cream or yellowish stone in ground colour, and spotted, blotched, and streaked with dark brown and grey.

The young ones, both in down and in their first coat of feathers, harmonise very closely with their natural surroundings, and upon the first sign of danger, which is generally detected from afar by their ever watchful parents, crouch flat upon the ground and remain perfectly still until they are re-assured by a warning note from one or other of the old birds. In the winter Oyster Catchers frequently consort with curlews upon the seashore.

Mice at Supper.



"It is a pretty and interesting little animal."

THE COMMON MOUSE

THE Common Mouse is too well known by everybody to need description. In character it is quite cosmopolitan, and sticks to man closer than a brother. It is a pretty and interesting little animal, but, alas! cursed by two awful drawbacks to universal popularity—an evil scent, and a desperately mischievous disposition. With the blackbeetle it shares the distinction of dividing women into two classes—those who are afraid of it, and those who are not.

Whether in cottage or palace, cleaving the mighty ocean or delving in the darkest depths of the earth, it is all the same to the Common Mouse. If there is a hole to hide in, and a crumb to eat, there will he be cheerfully sharing the weal and woe of mortal man. Some years ago I descended a coal mine to view the workings, and found an old labourer clearing debris out of a pony stable, in which mice were so numerous that he had been obliged to tie string tightly round his ankles in order to prevent the nimble creatures from running up the insides of his trouser-legs.

The Common Mouse can climb window curtains with ease, and even run up and down ordinary string suspending a bird-cage containing seed, of which it is inordinately fond. It can leap from a height of ten or twelve feet without inconvenience, and I have even known one fall from the second story of a London warehouse into the street, and then run off without having suffered any apparent injury.

This rodent has something of the persistency of King Bruce's spider in its composition. Not long ago a friend told me that one inhabiting his study came forth every evening, when normal quiet prevailed, and amused itself by climbing some bulrushes placed in a vase for decorative purposes. One blade of the vegetation seemed to exercise a peculiar fascination over the animal, and although it bent and let the little gymnast fall to the floor every time an

attempt was made to climb to its tip, the mouse, without dismay or apparent

THE COMMON MOUSE.

understanding, tried again and again evening after evening.

The two specimens figured in our plate lived with others of their kind in a tool shed in my garden. Observing that they came forth towards evening in search of food, I placed some oatmeal on a path close by, and fixed my camera in position. After making a number of exposures I hopefully developed, but, alas! only to discover that all I had secured were the portraits of india-rubber mice stretching from one side to the other of each plate. The timid little beasties had heard my time shutter open, and had moved. Here was a pretty problem. The animals were too quick for a slow exposure, and the light too poor for a fast one! This is how I surmounted the difficulty. Placing two cameras in front of the food—one with a plate in it and the other without—I practised the shutter of the empty apparatus until the mice grew used to its slight grating sound, and then quietly opened the other in front of my unexposed plate with entirely satisfactory results.

The Marsh Warbler.

"The nest is not such an exquisite structure as that of the Reed Warbler."

THE MARSH WARBLER

ONE day, whilst lying face downwards under a thick canopy of brambles and nettles, with a sluggish, muddy West Country river meandering silently towards the sea on one side of me, and an ancient clay-pit, overgrown with reeds and osiers, on the other, I suddenly heard a bird I had never listened to before. It was far more musical than the Reed Warbler, and, although a pronounced plagiarist, had nothing of the incontinent spluttering of the sedge bird in its delivery.

Peering upwards through an opening in the foliage with great caution, I beheld the vocalist sitting on the topmost spray of a bramble only a few feet away. It was the very bird I had come a long way to study—a Marsh Warbler, singing to his mate. He was a little brown bird, about the same size and shape as a Reed Warbler, but without the rusty red on his sides and rump, and his legs were pale flesh colour instead of slaty brown. His vocal powers supplied the most striking difference, however, for if Nature has denied him brilliant plumage, she has certainly made amends in the character of his voice. Whilst I listened this master-singer imitated the song thrush, the blackbird, and the nightingale, amongst other birds, and after rendering one item from his wonderfully varied repertoire, he paused as if to allow of its being considered and enjoyed before he went on to another.

It is difficult to understand why such an accomplished musician should have remained undiscovered, or confused with another bird of inferior vocal powers, for such a length of time. Even Prof. Alfred Newton considered it premature to admit it as a British bird in the latest

MARSH WARBLER'S NEST.

edition of "Yarrell," published between 1870–80. Thanks, however, to the painstaking labours of Mr. Harting, the Rev. Ward Fowler, and others, it has been proved to breed in Somersetshire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Surrey and Cambridgeshire.

The nest, which consists of dry grass-stems, moss, downy fibre and horsehair, is not such an exquisite structure as that of the Reed Warbler. It is suspended amongst nettles, meadow-sweet, and mugwood, and upon occasion I have even seen it in a hedgerow at a height of four or five feet from the ground. One remarkable difference in regard to it is that it is not built over water, whereas that of the species with which it has been confused invariably is.

The eggs, numbering from four to seven, luckily supply very definite diagnostic characteristics. Their greenish white to greenish blue ground colour is much lighter and clearer than is the case in the eggs of the more widely known Reed Warbler. They are spotted and blotched with olive brown, with underlying markings of grey. Sometimes these markings are numerous, and at others they occur sparingly.

The male bird sings on the wing during the days of courtship, and sometimes lifts up his sweet voice by night.

As might be expected, this species is migratory, arriving in England in May, and leaving again during August.

THE BROWN RAT.

"In the summer-time it takes to hedge-banks."

"My hospitality was greatly appreciated."

THE BROWN RAT

THIS animal is of Asiatic origin, and first found its way into Britain during the eighteenth century, since which time it has practically banished its forerunner the Black Rat. To the field naturalist, whom experience and temperament teach to look upon everything with an unprejudiced eye, it is an extremely interesting creature. Although his hand has ever been raised in enmity against it, it has followed man as a scavenger to the uttermost ends of the earth, ploughed the mighty deep of every sea with him, and descended the darkest depths of the earth in order to take advantage of his ill-considered trifles. It can exist almost anywhere, and upon anything, from limpets to leather. Often living amidst the most filthy surroundings, it takes the utmost pains to keep itself scrupulously clean. It can climb like a squirrel, leap like a greyhound, and swim like an otter.

In the summer time it takes to hedgebanks and those of streams, where it breeds most prolifically. The usual number of young ones in a litter is from seven to twelve, but as many as seventeen have been found in a single nest. During the autumn old and young alike commence to search for warmer and drier quarters in ricks, dwelling-houses, stables, and sheds.

In order to secure the pictures illustrating this article I fed Rats living in a Surrey hedgebank every evening for a week or two upon coarse oatmeal, of which they are excessively fond. My hospitality was greatly appreciated, and occasionally I had as many as ten Rats all sitting round the little hillock of food at once.

A Rat's nose is of much more importance to him than his eyes, and by it nearly every kind of critical inquiry is made. If a stranger arrived at my improvised supper-table all the animals sitting round would take a careful inquiring sniff at him. I was always particular

not to touch the oatmeal with my hands, and one evening, before allowing it to

BROWN RATS.

trickle from the bag in which I carried it, cleared away some vegetation from the side of the hedgebank. An attenuated rootlet defied my best efforts to pull it out, so I left it trailing over the track used by the rodents when on their way to supper. The first Rat that came along sniffed it over in the most critical manner, and, retreating, made a detour in order to reach the food. I rubbed the head of a kipper along a smooth, straight stick that grew upright in the hedgerow, and then tied it with string about a yard above ground. The scent at the bottom was soon detected, and followed up the stick, Rat after Rat ascending to nibble at the tasty morsel. After this I suspended a scrap of fish so that it was on a level with the crown of the bank, but about seven inches from the sloping part immediately beneath it. One rodent after another caught the scent, but in attempting to follow it down the sloping bank, lost it, and apparently could not see the source of its origin dangling just overhead. By-and-by a veteran came along, worked the scent until it was lost, then looking up espied the food, and tried to pull it down. This proving useless the patriarch tiptoed, bit through the string by which the kipper's head was suspended, and scampered off in triumph with the tit-bit.

Rats show great courage in defence of their young, and will swim streams with them in their mouths when danger threatens their safety. They also know by some mysterious means when rain is coming, and, if living in a dry place, grow very restless over the prospects of a drink.

Common Dotterel on Nest.

"The nest is a slight natural hollow."

THE DOTTEREL

IT is a curious reflection that the brown trout should have innocently exercised such a baleful influence over the chances of this rare and interesting bird propagating its species in England. Until a few decades ago the Dotterel nested regularly on several mountain tops in Cumberland, Westmorland, and Yorkshire, but, owing to the unfortunate fact that some of its feathers make excellent artificial trout-flies, it was persistently shot for the sake of these, and finally banished. Solitary pairs still try to re-establish themselves in the ancient strongholds of their species, but alas! in vain for the ubiquitous egg collector, who always argues that a rival may come that way and take what his conscience tells him for pity's sake to spare, sees to it that the luckless bird shall have no quarter.

In order to secure the photographs illustrating this article I journeyed to a Scottish mountain top, which in the interests of the bird had better remain nameless, and there, at an elevation of something like 3,000 feet above sea level, I enjoyed an excellent opportunity of studying the Dotterel at home. Its summer haunts are amidst the quiet solitudes of the lonely mountain tops where the silence is only broken by the distant croak of a raven, and hardly another bird saving the melancholy ptarmigan is to be seen.

The nest is a slight, natural hollow amongst woolly-fringe lichen, and the stunted vegetation common to the general barrenness of considerable elevations. It is said that the Dotterel's nest, as a rule, is without any kind of lining, but the one figured contained a few bits of lichen and dead grass that had evidently been gathered for the purpose.

This species presents no difficulties whatsoever to the naturalist-photographer, for after an acquaintance of two days with the male of the pair I studied, he became so confident in the

harmlessness of my intentions that he allowed me to stroke him on the back

NEST OF DOTTEREL.

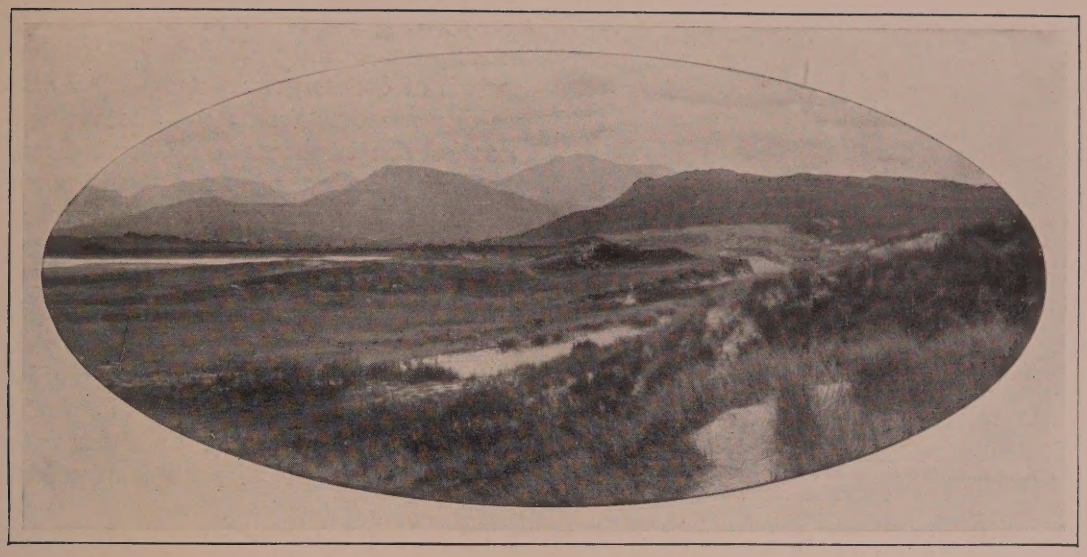
with my hand, and this whilst two gamekeepers stood only a few yards away watching me. In fact whilst I was exposing a plate upon the eggs he spoilt it by coming and sitting down in the nest.

It is said that the male bird assists the female in the work of incubation. In the present instance he did all the work, and waxed angry whenever his mate came along to see how matters were progressing. Several times when she approached within forty or fifty yards he rose and with a great show of anger chased her right away from the neighbourhood of the nest. Once or twice she waited for his coming, and when he flew straight at her she ducked in order to avoid the blow, and losing his balance he rolled over and over. It may be that his irritable temper was occasioned by the fact that the chicks were on the point of hatching out, as they could be plainly heard cheeping, and he did not wish to be bothered at such a critical period.

Both male and female have a curious habit of standing very erect, and jerking their bodies upwards, in such a way as to make it appear as if they were in danger of falling over backwards.

This species arrives in Britain during April and May, and leaves again during August and September to spend the winter months in Palestine, Egypt, and Northern Africa.

Common Tern on Nest.



"It breeds quite commonly round the coast on the shores of estuaries and inland lakes."

THE COMMON TERN

THE Common Tern, or Sea Swallow, arrives upon our shores about the end of April and during the first half of May, breeds in June, and leaves us again for the Sunny South in August and September, sometimes lingering as late as October. It is not so numerous as its relative, the Arctic Tern, but breeds quite commonly round the coast on the shores of estuaries and inland lakes. I have frequently seen it on large bodies of water near London, such as the Elstree reservoir, and it may occasionally be observed hovering over the Serpentine during the migration season.

At close quarters, or through good field-glasses, this species may be readily distinguished from the Arctic Tern by the fact that the tip of its bill is black, whereas that of the last named bird is all coral-red. Unfortunately, an ordinary photographic plate does not show this distinguishing peculiarity.

Like its congeners, the Common Tern breeds in colonies. The nest consists of a few bits of dead grass, or other herbage, placed in a slight hollow, but sometimes there is nothing at all, the eggs lying on sand amongst stones or upon rock. They number two or three, of a light stone buff, olive or umber brown ground colour, with ash grey and light and dark brown markings. Specimens belonging to this species may occasionally be met with of a light greenish blue ground colour. The nest figured in our illustration contained a dwarf egg, which looked somewhat odd beside its normal sized companion.

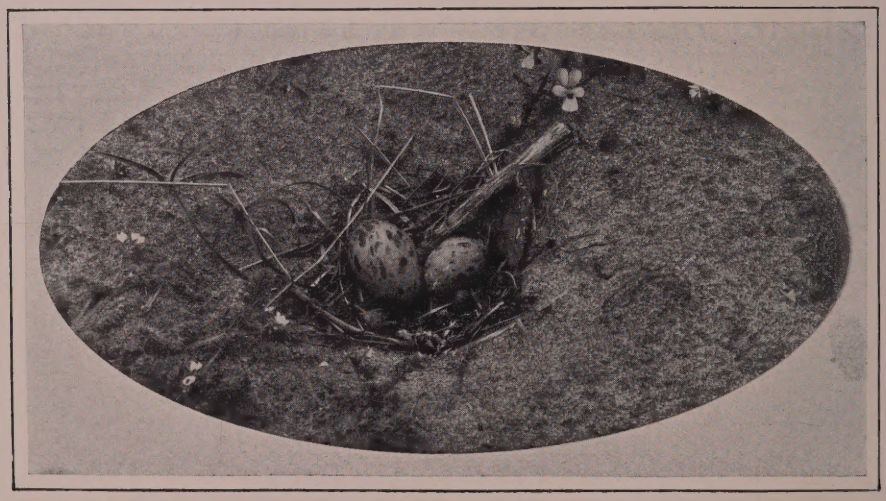
The photographs illustrating this article were all obtained at Ravenglass in Cumberland, where the species breeds in great numbers, especially on the flat ground to the left of the sand dunes shown in the above illustration.

The Common Tern, although a beautiful creature, whether at rest or on the wing, is one of the most ill-natured birds breeding in the British Isles.

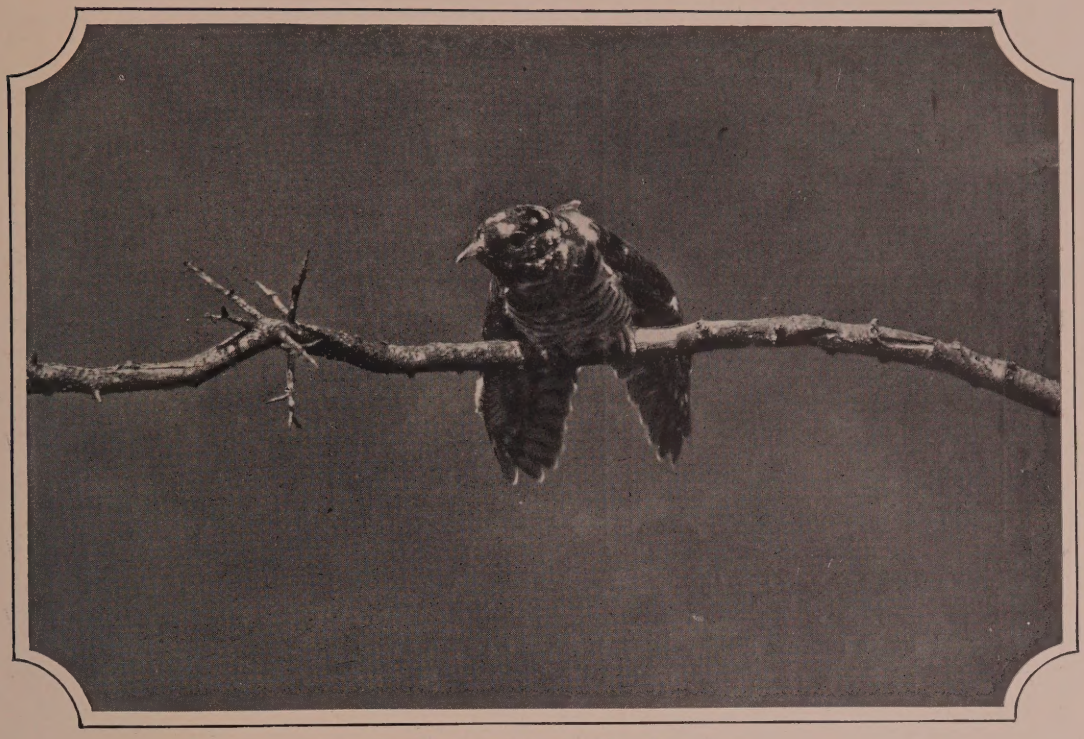
TERNS AT HOME.

Whilst at Ravenglass I noticed that if a young black-headed gull happened to stray from the sand dunes where it had been bred on to the ground occupied by the Terns, it was instantly attacked in the most savage and persistent manner. Again and again a bird would swoop from an altitude of twenty or thirty feet, strike the unfortunate chick on the head, and roll it over and over until it retreated to its own quarters, and took shelter beneath a friendly bunch of nettles, or tuft of coarse grass. One day I was making some remark upon the viciousness of sea swallows to young Farren, the boatman who assists his aged father to ferry visitors from the village of Ravenglass over to the gullery, when he told me of an extraordinary incident he once witnessed. A couple of partridges which innocently strayed, with their brood of young ones, amidst the Common Terns were instantly attacked, and all slain outright with the exception of one of the parent birds.

When the breeding ground of a large colony of these birds is visited they all rise into the air, and, with loud, sharp notes that sound like "*pirre,*" fly overhead, sometimes performing the most wonderful aerial evolutions. If the intruder should keep still, however, for a little while, they will all, with exception of the birds owning nests within a few yards of him, settle down again to their duties.



Tree Pipit Feeding a Young Cuckoo.



A young Cuckoo stretching its wings.

THE CUCKOO

WHOLE volumes have been written upon the history and habits of this peculiarly interesting visitor to our shores, but, in spite of this fact, many strange problems relating to its life and economy remain still unsolved.

Arriving in April, its welcome voice is heard in nearly every quarter of the British Isles throughout May and June. By the middle of the latter month, however, its song has deteriorated in quality, and the first note is frequently doubled in a way that suggests stammering. The bird frequently sings on the wing, and may sometimes be heard "telling its name to all the hills" throughout every hour of the night.

By the middle of July nearly all our adult Cuckoos have commenced to wing their way to Africa, leaving their offspring to the care of foster-mothers, and to take the hazard of an unguided flight to the winter haunts of their species.

The Cuckoo, it is hardly necessary to relate, does not build a nest, sit on its eggs, or rear its own young. Like other members of its family found in the Old World, and birds in no way related to it in America, it deposits an egg, which is very small in comparison with the layer, in some other bird's nest, and leaves the dupe to hatch out and rear its offspring. How this parasitic habit originated no man knows, and all the ingenious speculations that have been formulated to account for it are to my mind based upon insufficient evidence.

Although female Cuckoos undoubtedly

SEDGE WARBLER'S NEST CONTAINING A CUCKOO'S EGG.

lay several eggs (some authorities put the number at five), as a rule, only one is deposited in the nest of each small bird victimised; sometimes two are found, and occasionally as many as three, and it is reasonable to suppose in such cases they are deposited by different birds. Several observers have witnessed a Cuckoo lay her egg on the ground, pick it up in her bill, and place it in the nest of the dupe that she intends to rear her young.

Sometimes the egg is deposited before the owner of the nest has commenced to lay, and at others after she has begun to sit. This, however, does not make any difference to the young Cuckoo, for if it is hatched first it throws the eggs out of the nest, and if last, the young ones, and secures the whole home to itself. If two young Cuckoos should happen to be hatched in the same nest, the stronger generally succeeds in ejecting the weaker.

All kinds of small birds, such as hedge sparrows, robins, wagtails, meadow pipits, tree pipits, sedge warblers, reed warblers, and yellow-hammers are victimised. The foster parents always appear to be proud of their giant chick, and the tree pipit shown in our plate worked particularly hard to supply the ever-hungry young chick with insects. After a young Cuckoo has fledged it sits about on branches and other objects, and frequently stretches its wings, as seen in the headpiece to this article, whilst waiting for its foster parents to return with more food.

THE NIGHTJAR.

"It is a quaint, sleepy-looking bird."

"Young Nightjars harmonise with their natural surroundings in an admirable manner."

THE NIGHTJAR

THE Nightjar, Goatsucker, or Fern Owl, as it is variously known, is a migrant, arriving in May and departing again in September or October. It is a quaint, sleepy-looking bird, with the gravity of an owl when at rest, and the activity of a hawk when on the wing. It has one peculiarity that distinguishes it from all other British birds, for, when at rest in a tree, instead of sitting athwart a branch, it lies right along it, and with its head depressed below the level of its body, and its harmonising coloration becomes very difficult to see.

The Nightjar makes no kind of nest whatsoever, but contents itself by dropping its two white, or greyish-white, eggs—clouded, blotched, and marbled with dark brown and underlying markings of bluish lead colour—on the ground, beneath bracken, heather, furze bushes, or quite in the open on heaths, commons, and open spaces in woods and copses in dry sandy districts.

Whilst the female is sitting on her eggs or young she generally has her eyes closed, or only partially open, and the mixed greys and browns of her plumage make her resemble a piece of bark or dead branch so closely that she is often passed without being detected by the wayfarer. If she should be discovered and driven from her charge she will frequently alight on a neighbouring stump or other convenient vantage-point, and opening her large, flesh-coloured mouth, threaten the intruder.

Young Nightjars harmonise with their natural surroundings in an admirable manner, as may be seen by the illustration on this page.

This species lives upon moths, cockchafers, and other insects that become active during twilight, and the bird's wonderful powers of flight when twisting and turning in pursuit of its winged prey make it difficult to believe that it is the sluggish-looking

creature seen at rest during the broad light of day.

NIGHTJAR'S EGGS.

The Fern Owl has a serrated claw on the middle toe of each foot, but for what purpose it has been made saw-like is not clearly known. Naturalists have evolved all kinds of ingenious theories to explain its purposes—such as, that it is used as an aid in catching prey, to comb the bristles growing round the base of the upper mandible, to assist in maintaining its position on a bough, and so forth—but, without definite evidence, none of them appears convincing.

The so-called song of this species consists of the continuous repetition of a single jarring note, which has been compared to the noise of a spinning-wheel by some observers, and to gas bubbling through water by others. It may be heard during a calm evening when the vocalist is nearly half a mile away.

A pair of these interesting birds will return to the same breeding place year by year with the utmost regularity.

Young Rabbits at Home.

"The nesting burrow . . . is generally made in a field or wood at some distance from the warren."

THE RABBIT

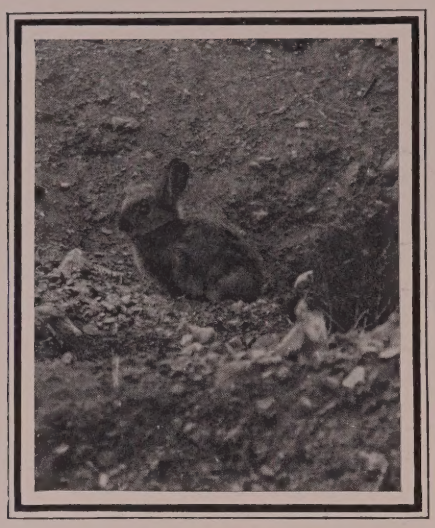
THIS exceedingly common animal is at once useful and mischievous. It furnishes sport for the humble gunner, food for the million, and warm winter wraps for those who cannot indulge in more expensive furs; but, alas! when it becomes too numerous it is very harmful to the farmers' crops.

It lives in colonies of varying size, according to the food supply at hand, and the measure of protection it receives amongst rocks and in burrows excavated by its own labours.

Its hind legs are longer and stronger than its fore ones, and in consequence of this it can run with greater ease and expedition up-hill than down. Another curious thing in this connection is that recognised tracks lead from all burrows to the feeding ground round about, and a Rabbit can travel faster along one of these tracks than it can over unfamiliar ground.

Young Rabbits are born blind and without a particle of down upon their dusky little bodies. A separate burrow is made for breeding purposes. As a rule it is about a couple of feet in length, and terminates in a circular chamber, which is plentifully lined with soft dead grass and down plucked from the under-parts of the mother Rabbit's body. This serves a two-fold, useful purpose. It keeps the young Rabbits warm, and enables them to find the maternal fountains of sustenance the more easily. The nesting burrow, or "stop," is generally made in a field or wood at some distance from the warren, but

upon occasion it simply consists of a short tunnel, running at right angles



ON THE ALERT.

from a much-used burrow. Here its greater depth preserves its helpless occupants from the fox and the badger, but not from the dreaded stoat or weasel.

When a nest is made out in an open field the young ones are fed by night, and until their eyes are open their mother invariably stops up the mouth of the hole with earth before leaving in the early hours of the morning. I have, however, known an old Rabbit stay with her young in the nesting burrow all day.

After young Rabbits have left the nesting "stop," and been led to the warren, their mother overlooks their goings and comings until they are able to take care of themselves. If any form of danger should suddenly appear upon the scene whilst they are all away from the warren, feeding in the dusk of evening, she warns them by vigorously stamping the ground with her hind feet.

Although a stoat can generally paralyse a Rabbit with fear, to the point of abject helplessness, such is the courage of maternal love that a doe has been known to attack the deadly enemy of her species in defence of her helpless young.

A male Rabbit may be distinguished from a female by the fact that he has a broader, chubbier head and less graceful facial outlines.

The Common Gull.

"The Common Gull is by no means an easy bird to photograph."

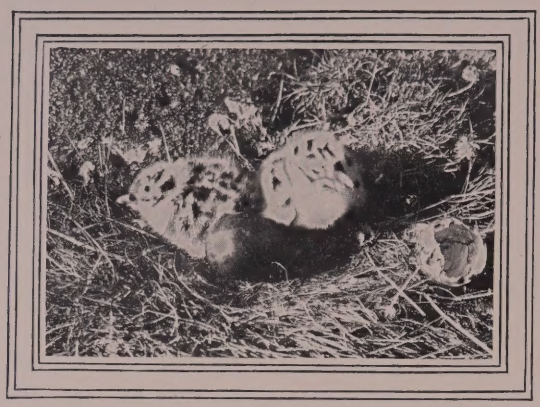
THE COMMON GULL

THIS bird does not breed in either England or Wales, so that, during a part of the year at any rate, it enjoys a somewhat misleading popular name on the southern side of the Tweed. In Scotland it certainly is "common," for in the Hebrides I have known a ploughman obliged to wear his oilskins whilst at work in order to prevent his clothes being whitewashed by its droppings.

This species is frequently confused with the Kittiwake Gull, but its identity may always be assured by remembering the following simple facts. The Common Gull has greenish yellow legs and feet, and breeds on the ground on grassy slopes facing the sea, amongst rocks shelving down to the ocean, and on islands in fresh-water lochs, whereas the Kittiwake nests on ledges in precipitous maritime cliffs, and has dusky coloured legs and feet.

When the breeding season is over the Common Gull wanders south, and may be seen in numbers not only on the seashore, but inland, where it will follow the plough as assiduously as the Black-headed Gull. It never goes far from land, and is soon driven inshore by bad weather at sea.

This species builds a somewhat bulky nest of heather, dry seaweed, and dead grass, and on more than one occasion I have had the roof of one of my hiding contrivances stripped by it and the Herring Gull of heather stalks which I had pulled for the purpose of concealing myself from birds flying overhead. It lays three eggs as a rule, although two only may sometimes be found, and, occasionally, as many as four. They are buffish or dark olive-brown in ground colour, spotted, blotched, and streaked

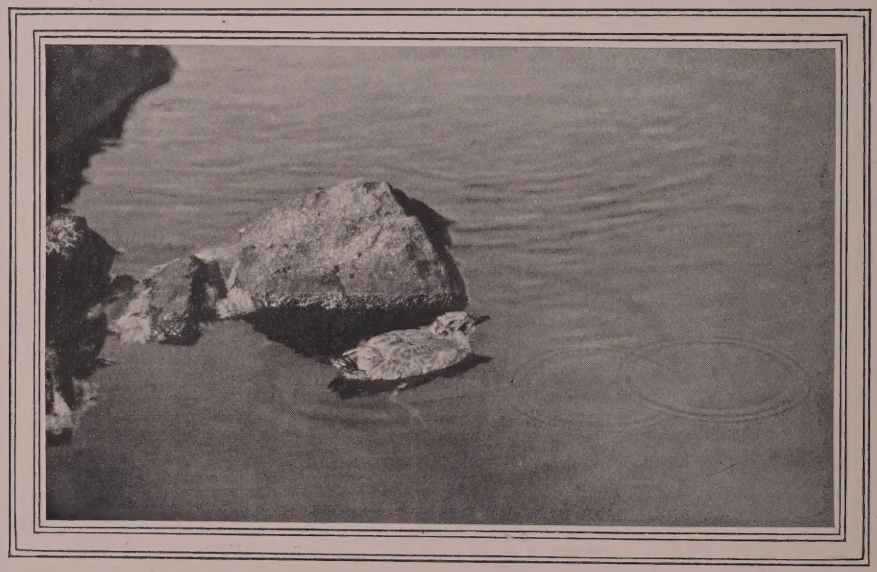


NEWLY-HATCHED COMMON GULLS.

with grey, dark brown and black; and are easily distinguished from those of other British breeding Gulls by their size, smallness of the markings upon them, and the locality of the nest.

Although capable of making a great clamour when its nesting haunt is visited, the Common Gull is by no means an easy bird to photograph. In spite of the fact that the subject of our illustration was nesting close to some rough rocks, upon which the waves of the Atlantic thundered all day long, she was so quick of hearing that if I made the slightest sound inside my stone house, she instantly heard it and left her nest in a great hurry.

The Common Gull is very fond of resting on some coign of vantage, such as a large pointed stone on an island in the middle of a loch. After one bird has occupied the position for a while another will come along and take its place, but whether any kind of sentinel work is intended it is difficult to say. An Irish friend tells me that he has noticed the same kind of predilection for the top of a flagstaff, and adds that the birds always appear to be very courteous to each other, for after one has rested for a while it readily gives place to a companion.



Linnet Feeding Young.

"Furze bushes form the most favourite sites of all for the nest of the Linnet."

THE LINNET

THE ever-cheerful little Linnet is the poor man's favourite cage pet. If caught in the autumn it readily adapts itself to confinement, but if in the spring the wee prisoner generally mopes and dies.

A fine male, arrayed in all the glory of his wedding garments, has the top of the head and breast coloured in rich glossy blood-red. This is very variable, however, in tint, and may be anything from brownish red to lemon yellow. The red is never seen on birds kept in captivity.

The Linnet is common all over the country where furze bushes abound. It is gregarious, excepting in the breeding season, when the flocks break up. I have, however, seen small companies of adult birds roaming over the countryside in the middle of May, when nests containing eggs or small young ones are common.

It is more numerous in the summer than the winter, being partly a migratory, and partly a resident species. From January to March flocks of Linnets that have been wandering over stubble fields and uncultivated pasture-lands in search of small seeds will, during the late afternoon of a fine day, alight in some tall tree and engage in a delightful chant. This chorus singing seems to be inspired by the soft sunshine. After March the proper individual song commences and is kept up until July. I

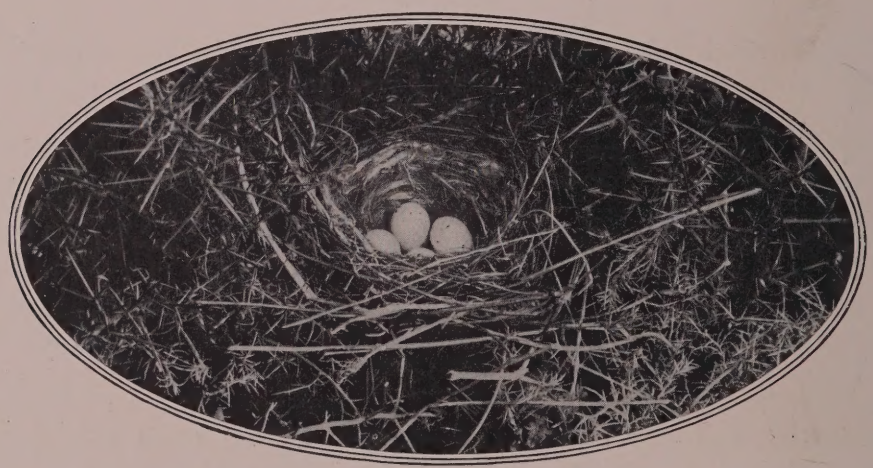
have heard it, however, as late as August during more than one season.

THE LINNET.

Throughout the pairing time the male birds are wont to alight on the highest sprays of furze and other bushes, where they sing almost incessantly. The "careless lay," as a poet has described it, is frequently poured forth whilst the vocalist is gracefully descending through the air to some favourite perching place.

The breeding season commences in April and is continued as late as July, and even August, when I have found nests containing eggs. Furze bushes form the most favourite sites of all for the nest of the Linnet, but it may be found in young fir trees, heather, juniper and other bushes. I have met with it almost on the ground in the rough herbage growing on a sea-wall, and at a height of twelve feet in an old thorn hedge. It is composed of small twigs, grass stems, and rootlets, with an inner lining of wool, hair, feathers or down. The eggs, numbering from four to six, are greyish white tinged with green or blue, and sparingly spotted with purplish brown.

Both parent birds engage in the work of feeding the chicks. All the food is brought along in the crop and regurgitated. The great anxiety of the old birds to deliver their partly digested caterpillars and other forms of insect life is only equalled by that of their open-mouthed offspring to receive them.



YOUNG COMMON WHITETHROATS.

"They seemed quite unconcerned about the camera."

"The female spends nearly all her time covering her chicks."

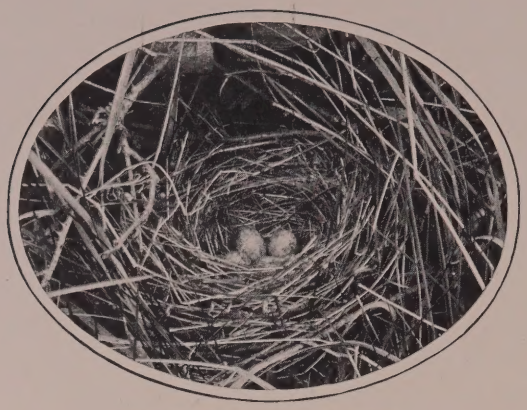
THE COMMON, OR GREATER WHITETHROAT

THIS very common and widely distributed warbler arrives upon our shores in April and May, and departs again for its winter quarters in the more congenial South during September and October. The males, as in the case of so many other species, come first, and pairing and nest-building commence soon after the appearance of the members of the opposite sex.

The male Whitethroat is a persistent vocalist, and performs all kinds of wild antics, such as jerking his tail and shaking his wings, raising the feathers on his head, and puffing out his throat whilst delivering his passionate little ditty. He may sometimes be heard singing on the wing. According to my observations, he is the chief nest-builder and feeder of the chicks, and whilst engaged in the former task evidently believes that "song lightens toil," for he will frequently give utterance to his lively refrain even when he has dead grass straws in his bill.

The Common Whitethroat makes its nest at no great height from the ground in brambles, thick rough grass, wild rose bushes, heather, and nettles. The structure is a deep, slender, net-like affair, made of dead grass stems, and lined with horsehair. By country people this bird is widely known as the Nettle Creeper, on account of its habit of breeding amongst nettles and slipping stealthily away between their stems when disturbed.

The eggs number from four to six, and are of a dirty greenish-white ground colour, spotted and speckled with grey and brown. When disturbed, the female slips away amongst the undergrowth and commences to scold the intruder in notes that sound something like *cha, cha,* and *purr, purr.* If, however, the male happens to be near the nest when



COMMON WHITETHROAT'S NEST.

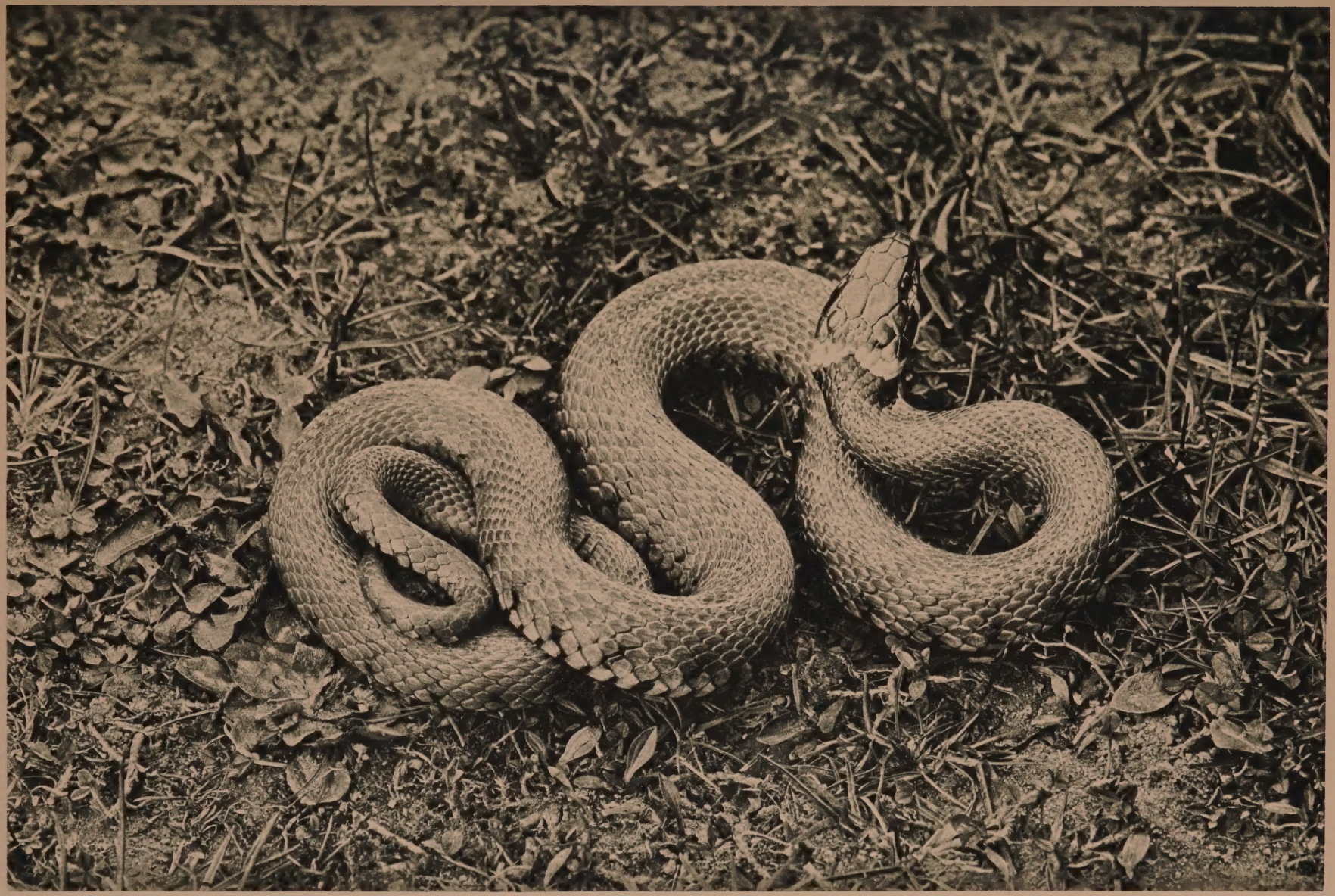
his mate is disturbed he is even more emphatic in his remonstrance than she is.

I have heard it said that the Greater Whitethroat is easily tamed, and am willing to believe it on account of the small amount of trouble the group of pretty little chicks shown in the coloured plate gave me in securing their portraits; they seemed, indeed, quite unconcerned about the camera.

During July and August families of these birds sometimes visit my garden, but, although they are said to be fruit-eaters, I have never observed them in the act of doing damage whilst searching for caterpillars and other forms of insect life.

Throughout the prevalence of cold weather the female spends nearly all her time covering her chicks and keeping them warm, whilst her mate, with commendable industry, searches for food which he distributes amongst the chicks with great celerity and impartiality.

Booth has left it upon record that during the spring migration, if there is any wind blowing whilst the Common Whitethroats are crossing the English Channel, the birds fly as low down as possible, in order to avoid its full force; if a heavy sea happens to be running at the time many of them are knocked down into the water by spray and never regain wing.



Common or Ringed Snake.

"It grows to a length of from thirty to thirty-six inches."

THE COMMON, OR RINGED SNAKE

THIS creature is far commoner in many parts of Britain than the general public would imagine. I have met with it in the outer suburbs both on the northern and southern sides of London, and some years ago had a young one brought to me that had been picked up in a street close to Ludgate Hill. It had in all probability been conveyed thither from the country inside a roll of printing paper.

The Grass or Water Snake, as it is also sometimes called, frequents low, damp meadows, moist woods and tangled hedgerows growing in the neighbourhood of ponds, but may frequently be met with far from water of any kind. It grows to a length of from thirty to thirty-six inches, and occasionally even longer specimens are found. The general coloration of the upper parts of the reptile's body is light brownish-grey, tinged with green, and marked with two rows of black spots. Immediately behind the head there is a broad band, or two curved spots of bright yellow, and this fact, together with its longer and more attenuated tail, readily distinguish it from the viper or adder, even when only a momentary glance of it is obtained.

The Common Snake casts its skin several times during the course of the summer, and looks very beautiful when the sun is shining upon its new coat of scales.

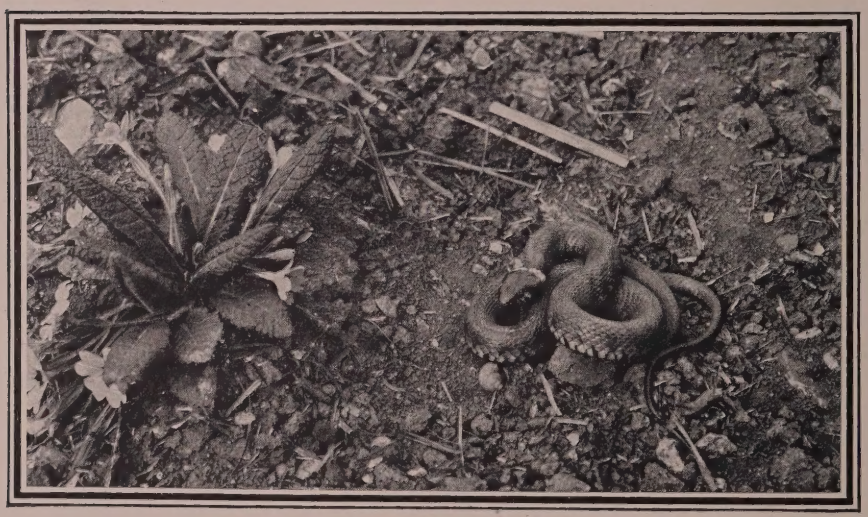
It swims with ease and expedition. In the water it catches frogs and small fishes, and, upon land, toads, lizards, mice, and small birds. I do not think, however, that it climbs bushes in order to rob birds' nests. On one occasion I surprised a member of this species in the act of swallowing a large toad, and Bell records the fact that he has heard a frog croak several minutes after it had been swallowed by its captor.

RINGED SNAKE ON THE ALERT.

The female lays from fifteen to twenty eggs of about the size of those produced by a domestic pigeon. As many as thirty, or even forty, have, however, occasionally been found. They are connected together by a glutinous substance, and deposited in a heap of manure, or collection of decaying leaves, and left to be hatched by the natural heat of such situations, aided by the warmth of the sun. If frightened whilst curled up sunning itself on a sheltered bank, the Common Snake timidly glides away for cover, but its track is frequently betrayed by the peculiar rustle of dead leaves over or through which it may be passing. When pursued it generally emits an offensive odour, which I have known to prove very disagreeable to a too inquisitive puppy.

Not long ago I had a young snake of this species sent to me which had two heads.

In the autumn Grass Snakes glide into holes under the roots of trees and other sequestered places, where a number of them will remain coiled together until roused to activity again by the warmth of spring sunshine.



Sandpiper on Her Nest.

"Sometimes the nest may be found close beside an almost earth-buried rock."

THE COMMON SANDPIPER

THIS interesting little member of the wader family has a very wide geographical distribution, being found practically all over the Old World. It is a migrant to our shores, arriving in April, and departing again in September and October.

The gravel-strewn shores of rivers, brooks, and lakes, along which it runs with great celerity and nimbleness in search of food, are its favourite haunts. Upon being disturbed the Sandpiper flies away some distance, and, alighting on a stone or other prominence, utters its soft plaintive call-notes, which sound something like *wheet, wheet, wheet.* Its tail and hindquarters are nearly always working up and down, as if actuated by some hidden spring.

It is about seven inches in length, and is known in many parts of the country as the Summer Snipe.

I have frequently watched it wade into shallow water in search of food, and, when necessity arises, it can dive and swim with ease.

The nest is made of short pieces of dead rushes, bracken, dry grass or leaves, and is placed in a hole in a bank, under a tangle of dead bracken, or in the shelter of a tuft of grass or rushes. Sometimes it may be found amongst large stones or close beside an almost earth-buried rock or old stump. A small island in the middle of a river nearly always forms a favourite nesting place. I have, however, on several occasions found members of this species breeding more than a hundred yards away from water.

The eggs number four, and are creamy yellow or pale straw in ground colour,

marked with umber brown spots and blotches. On rare occasions the markings form a ring round the larger end.

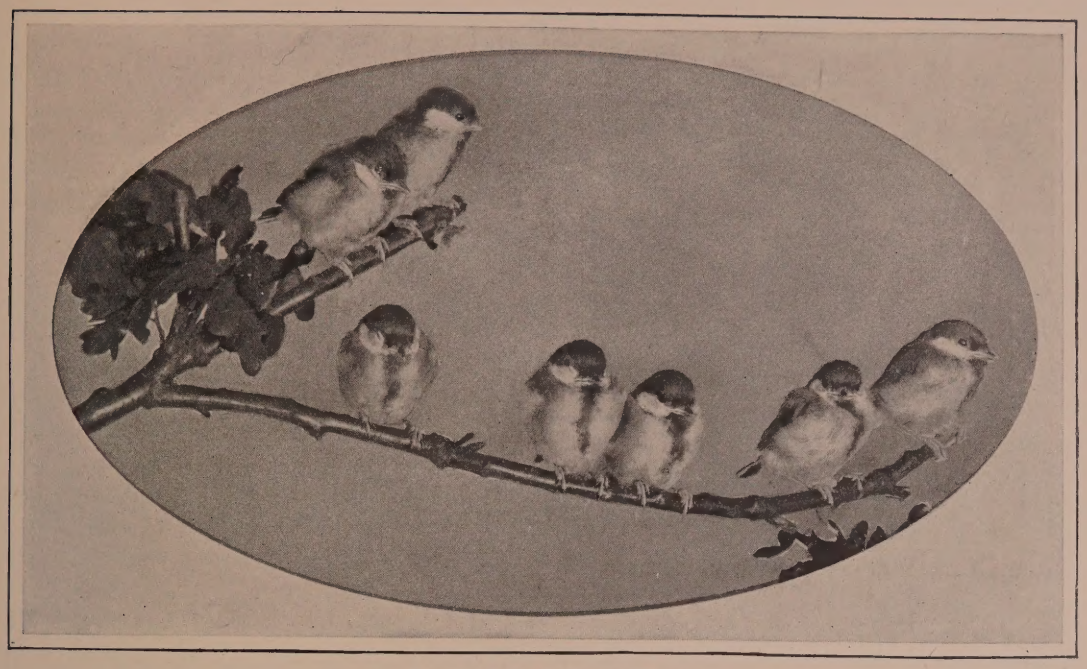
SANDPIPER'S NEST.

As Selby truly says: "If disturbed during the period of incubation, the female quits the nest as quietly as possible, and usually flies to a distance, making at this time no outcry; as soon, however, as the young are hatched, her manners completely alter, and the greatest agitation is manifested on the apprehension of danger, and every stratagem is tried, such as feigning lameness and inability of flight, to divert the attention of the intruder from the unfledged brood."

Young Sandpipers commence to run about almost directly after they leave the shell, and if any form of danger should suddenly appear upon the scene, at the first cry of warning from either of their parents, they instantly crouch flat upon the ground and remain absolutely still until the "all is well" note has again been sounded.

The protective coloration of the down on a young Sandpiper's back is strikingly manifested when the chick is seen crouching on the sandy margin of a river.

Great Tit or Oxeye.



Newly-fledged Great Tits.

THE GREAT TIT, OR OXEYE

THE striking colours, lively habits and oft-repeated notes of this bird render it familiar to everybody who takes the slightest interest in the science of ornithology. It is the largest member of the Tit-mouse family found in Britain, and is generally distributed wherever sheltered woods and gardens are to be found.

The male may readily be distinguished from the female by his brighter colours and the fact that the black line running down the centre of his yellow breast is broader and more pronounced than in the case of his mate.

The Great Tit feeds upon insects in varying stages of development, seeds, hazel nuts, and, alas, sometimes peas! Very frequently it may be seen and heard in the late autumn and early winter, holding a hazel nut down on a branch with its strong feet, whilst it delivers a rapid succession of far-sounding blows with its powerful bill in order to split the shell. In such circumstances I have, on more than one occasion, seen a nut slip from the grasp of an Oxeye and, shooting off at a tangent, strike some twig and roll beneath a collection of dead leaves or down the run of a mouse. After an accident of this kind the disappointed bird will search about for its lost treasure for a little while, and then, resuming its wonted cheerfulness, fly away in search of more food.

Every winter my children hang out the kernels of Barcelona nuts threaded upon black cotton, and it is amusing to watch the Great Tit trying to emulate the gymnastic feats of its smaller relative the "Blue Bonnet," which can hang upside down whilst clinging to the fruit, and feed even when twirled

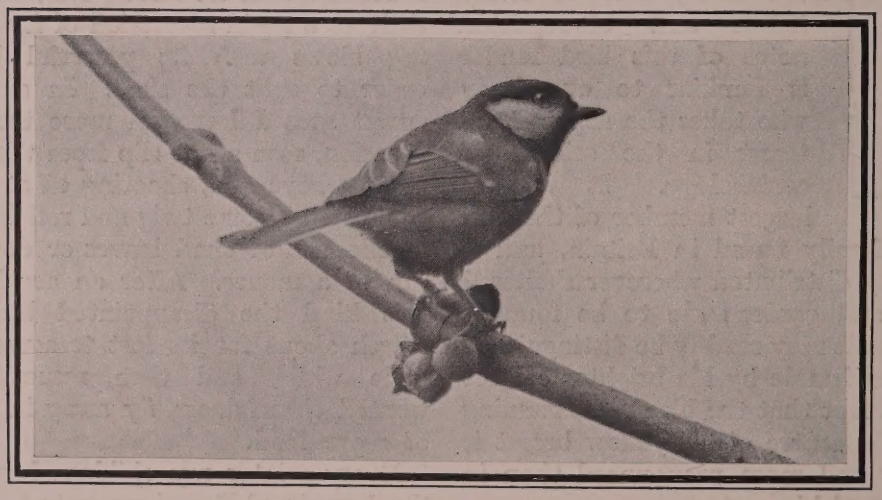
GREAT TIT'S NEST BUILT UNDER AN INVERTED FLOWER-POT.

round and round by the wind. Although the Oxeye cannot accomplish this, I have seen the bird, over and over again, stand on the branch to which the thread was fastened and haul it in reef by reef until the prize was secured.

In mild weather the male Oxeye will commence to utter his love notes as early as January. They are loud and harsh, and sound very much like the noise made by a saw-sharpener.

Almost any kind of hole, provided it be large enough, will suit this species for nesting purposes. In woods it frequently utilises the interior of a decaying stump, and in gardens an inverted plant pot will frequently be adopted. On several occasions I have found the old nest of a song thrush or blackbird lined with rabbit's down made to do service.

The eggs, numbering from six to ten, as a rule are white, spotted and speckled with red. The hen sits closely and hisses like a snake upon being molested.



THE COMMON DORMOUSE.

"It is to all intents and purposes a miniature squirrel."

"Its eyes are black, prominent, and bead-like."

THE COMMON DORMOUSE

THIS engaging little animal is common in most parts of the country where hazel bushes abound. It is to all intents and purposes a miniature squirrel, running along branches and leaping from twig to twig with the same amount of agility and assurance as its larger woodland neighbour.

The Common Dormouse is about five and a-half inches in length from the tip of its nose to the end of its tail. Its eyes are black, prominent, and bead-like. The fur on the upper parts of the animal's body is of a light tawny-brown colour, inclining to yellow beneath. On the throat and chest there is an elongated white patch, and in some specimens the tail is tipped with white.

Dormice feed upon nuts, acorns, and fruits of different kinds, which are generally consumed in the dusk of evening. During the autumn they lay up stores of food in hollow stumps for winter consumption, and about the middle of October, when chilly winds commence to blow, curl up and go to sleep. On mild, sunny days, however, they, like the squirrel, wake up in order to partake of food. The first sign of a resumption of activity is a low whistling kind of sound, and in consequence of it the animals are known to woodcutters as "Singing Mice."

Nuts are held between the fore-paws whilst a hole is being gnawed in them, and in the spring-time numbers of empty shells may be seen scattered outside some moss-grown hollow stump which has served as a storehouse during the winter months.

Nests for breeding purposes are built in hazels, brambles, blackthorns, yews, and other bushes. During a walk in Surrey I have found as many as five within two or three hundred yards. They are sometimes made inside the old homes of blackbirds and thrushes,

NEST OF DORMOUSE.

and consist for the greater part of dead grass, the finest blades forming the inner lining. I have been frequently surprised at the amount of heavy wind-lashed rain their domed roofs will withstand before they are penetrated by moisture.

The young usually number four, and are born in the spring, although a litter may occasionally be met with as late as September. On one occasion I had a hiding tent fixed up in a Surrey wood near my home, and although I was using it almost daily a Dormouse made her nest in some hazel branches I had bent down in order to obscure my canvas, and reared a family of young ones. When these began to leave their slender cradle of dead grass I could frequently hear and see them playing about on my tent cover overhead, as I sat taking photographs of different birds that came to drink and bathe in a little pool in front of me.

Dormice readily reconcile themselves to captivity, and are, in consequence, much esteemed by children as cage pets.

Common Partridge on Her Nest.

Good Partridge country.

THE COMMON PARTRIDGE

WHO does not know and love this little sporting bird, with its nut-brown plumage, whirring flight, and skirling call notes? It is plentiful in nearly all cultivated districts, and, indeed, so numerous, where preserving is resorted to on a large scale, that in Norfolk I have counted as many as seven pairs in a single field during the early spring. In high moorland districts, where it may sometimes be found breeding on the same ground as the red grouse, it is, of course, much less numerous, smaller in size, and, epicures say, of better flavour.

The Common Partridge, although shy and wary after being shot at, is really a bold bird. It will sit unconcernedly on a railway embankment within a few feet of an express train thundering past at sixty or seventy miles an hour, and has been known to face a dog in defence of its chicks. The individual figured in the photogravure was so courageous that she allowed me to remove a number of blades of grass that trailed across her back in such a way as to impede my view, and only hissed and pecked my hand when I touched her.

Although, apparently, ill-adapted for aquatic progression, this bird has been known to drop into the rough waters of a tidal river, and, in spite of a strong current, swim to the bank again in safety. Awkward accidents, however, sometimes happen to whole coveys when suddenly startled by some unexpected form of danger. The birds will fly out seawards, drop into the waves, and perish; or will attempt to fly in front of a moving railway train and get struck down, or crash with fatal violence into a meshwork of telegraph wires.

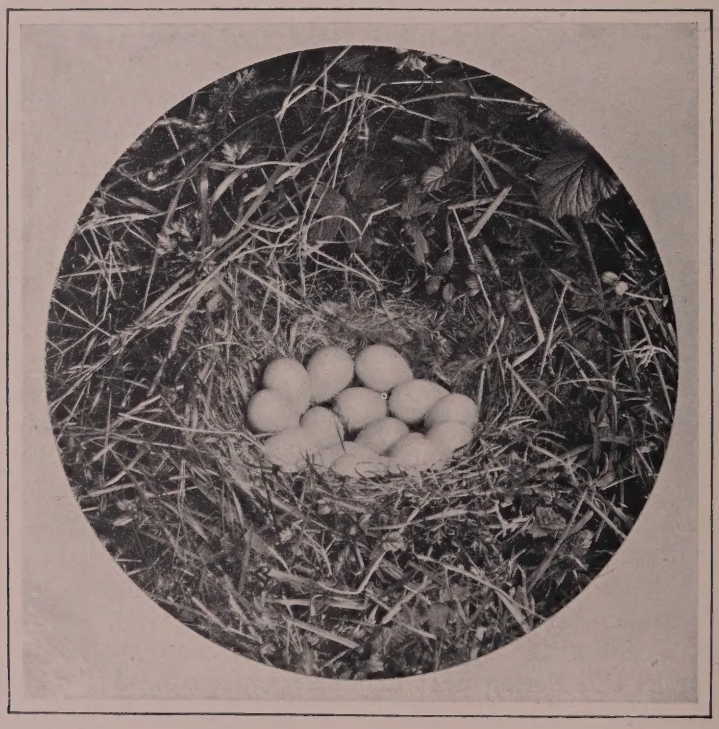
A Partridge's nest consists of a few blades of dead grass, bits of bracken, or leaves, placed in a slight hollow amongst the long grass at the foot of a hedgerow, under a bramble bush, in a bunch of nettles, in mowing grass, corn, or even on the top of a rick. The bird, indeed,

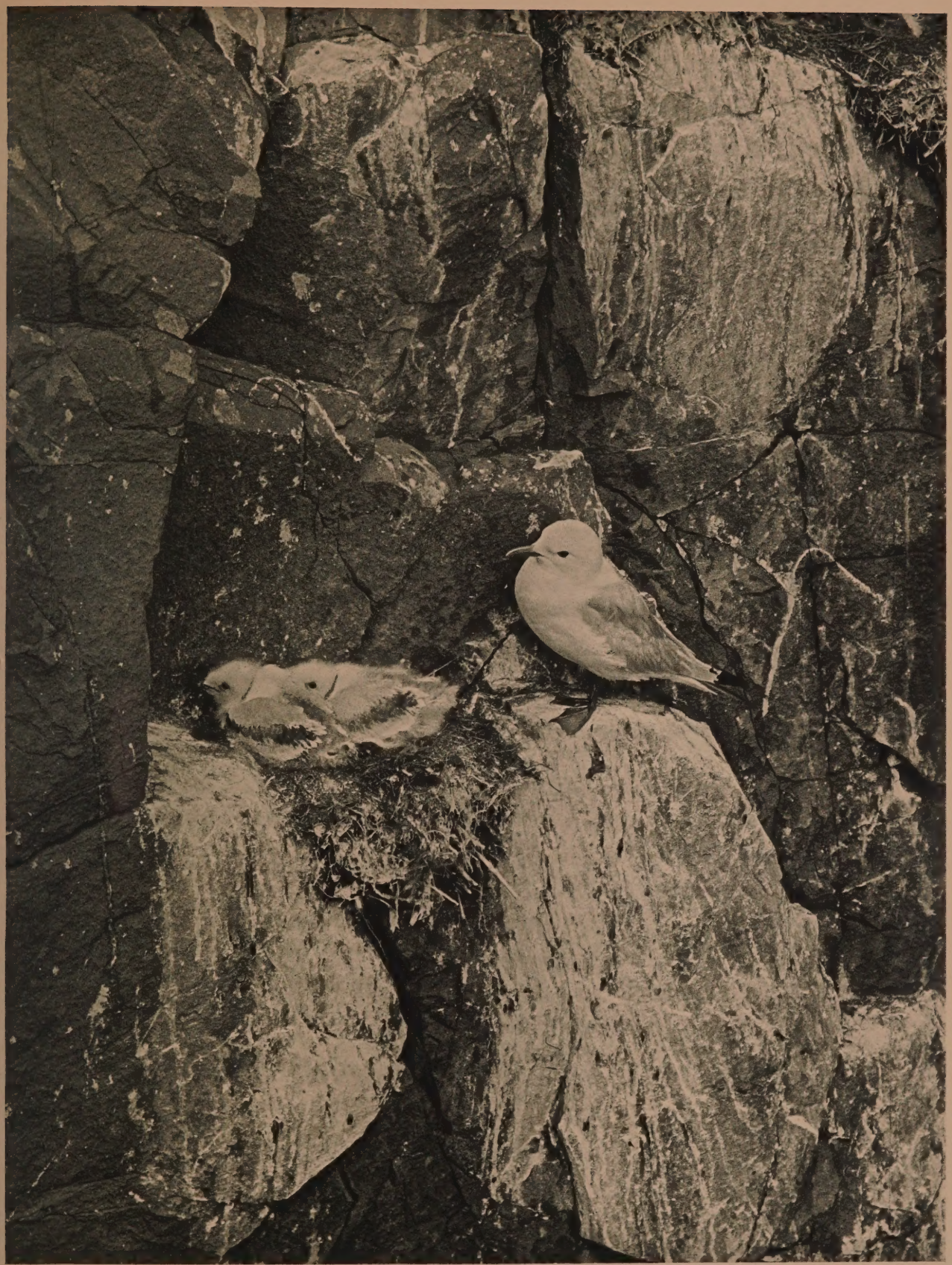
A STORM-DRIVEN PARTRIDGE.

appears to display a special liking for nesting in what would, at first sight, seem to be dangerous places—but, thanks to a curious provision of Nature, is seldom discovered or molested. The scent thrown off her body during the usual course of her life is suppressed to a great extent throughout the critical period of incubation, thus saving her from a very potent source of danger.

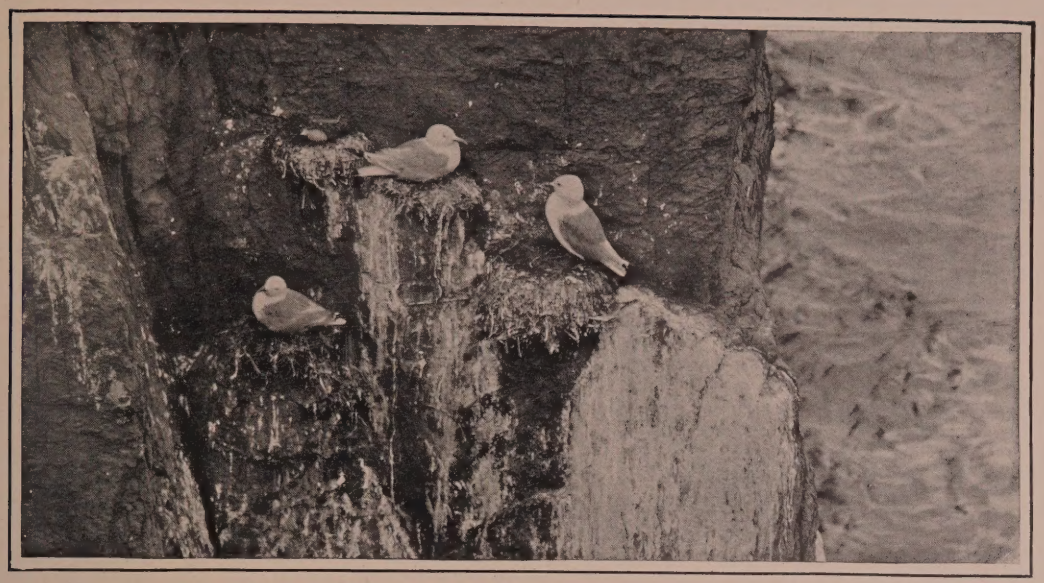
The olive brown eggs number from ten to sixteen or twenty, and occasionally even as many as thirty may be met with in the same structure. The last number, however, is undoubtedly the result of two hens laying in the same nest. There is nothing very wonderful in these instances of co-operative housekeeping, for on two occasions I have known the Common Partridge and the French or Red-Legged species not only to lay in the same nest, but to sit side by side, in perfect harmony and goodwill, upon the mixed clutches of eggs.

Both the male and female brood the chicks after they have been hatched, and show great affection for them.





Kittiwake Gull and Young.



"The Kittiwake breeds in all suitable cliffs round our coast."

THE KITTIWAKE GULL

I MUST confess to a great partiality for this gentle-mannered, beautiful little Gull. Its affection for its mate, maternal solicitude when the young are in the nest, and quaint call notes all appeal to the naturalist with irresistible charm. It is purely maritime in its habits, and does not resort to fresh water or land in search of food, like its congeners the Black-headed and Common Gulls.

Many people are apt to confuse this species with the Common Gull, but if they would remember that its feet and legs are of a dusky colour, and those of its relative greenish-yellow, they would have no difficulty in distinguishing the one bird from the other.

The Kittiwake breeds in all suitable cliffs round our coast, and, although it returns to its old haunts as early as March, does not commence to lay before May. The nest is composed of dry seaweed and dead grass, and is generally a small, compact structure; this being infrequently an imperative necessity occasioned by the narrowness of the ledge upon which it is built. At the Noup of Noss in the Shetlands, where the weather has worn long horizontal fissures in the rock, great numbers of Kittiwakes may be seen sitting almost side by side, and from a distance look like long rows of white dots.

On Ailsa Craig and at other places I have seen Kittiwakes, common guillemots, and razor bills all breeding close together and living in perfect friendship and harmony.

The eggs of this species number two or three and, occasionally, as many as four. In ground colour they vary from buffish brown to stone yellow, sometimes shaded with blue, spotted and blotched with ash grey, light brown and reddish brown.

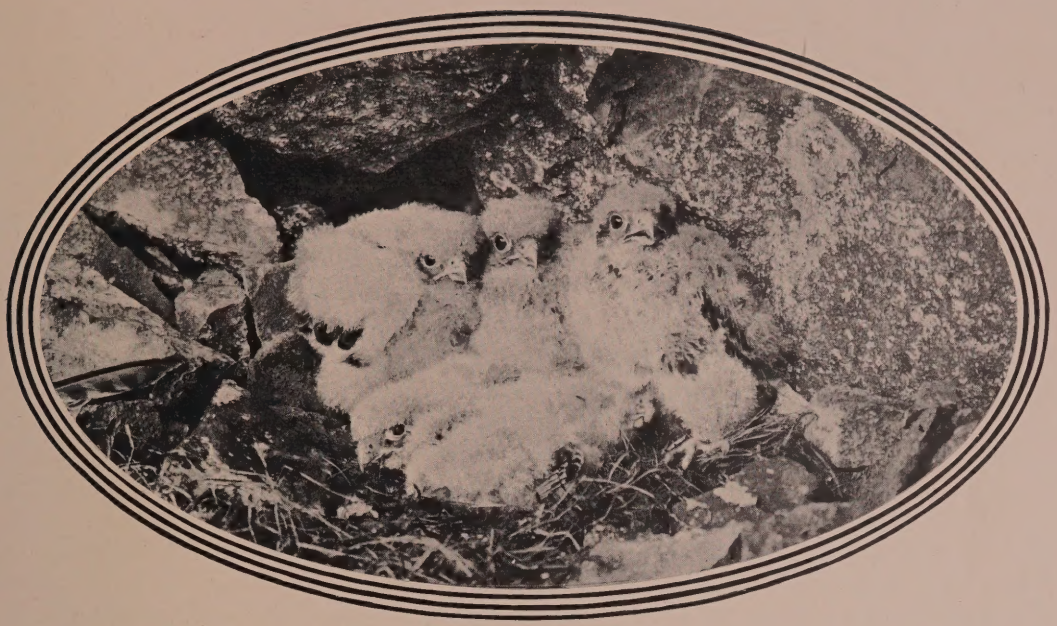
KITTIWAKE'S NEST.

The young fly at about the end of July or beginning of August, and some years ago their barred wings were in such demand as decoration for ladies' hats that as many as seven hundred birds were slaughtered in a single day at one breeding station alone.

In olden times the Kittiwake was consumed as human food and considered as good eating as a partridge. Let us hope that we have outgrown any desire to do this lovable little Gull any harm either for its flesh or feathers. It is a favourite with many people who do not profess to a great interest in ornithology, for it always tells the merest tyro its name by crying out "Kittiwake," "Kittiwake," "Kittiwake" whenever anyone approaches its breeding haunt.

These notes sound more like the words "Get-away," "Get-away," "Get-away" to some people, and I must confess that I have placed the same interpretation upon them when I have been peering over the edge of a dangerous cliff, or investigating the interior of some dark sea-cave in which the tide has been weirdly gurgling and moaning.

Young Kestrel.



"Its down-clad young ones crouching in a little hollow on a ledge in the face of a limestone cliff."

THE KESTREL

THE Kestrel is called the Windhover in many parts of the country, on account of its peculiar habit of facing the wind and sustaining itself in the same position for some time by the rapid vibration of its outstretched wings, whilst it scans the ground below in search of food. I have met people who professed that they could not distinguish this bird from the sparrow hawk. If they would remember that the latter bird has longer wings, is brownish grey in hue, instead of reddish brown, and does not fly at any great height or hover in the air, they would have no difficulty in distinguishing the one species from the other.

Many bird lovers express a fear that the Kestrel is growing rare in our country on account of the mistaken zeal of gamekeepers. I can assure them that their apprehension is groundless. On a recent railway journey between Liverpool and London I counted no fewer than seven individual birds on one side of the line alone, and on the day his late Majesty King Edward VII. died a friend showed me four old nests belonging to crows or magpies occupied by Kestrels within the radius of a mile in East Essex.

As a species the Windhover is a comparatively harmless bird, feeding upon mice, beetles, frogs, and grasshoppers, but individuals will sometimes take to preying upon small birds and the young of lapwings, partridges, and pheasants. During the summer of 1909 I was watching three downling peewits through my glasses when a Kestrel suddenly appeared upon the scene, hovered, and, pouncing, seized one of the unfortunate chicks and carried it off to its down-clad young ones, crouching in a little hollow on a

YOUNG KESTREL.

ledge in the face of a limestone cliff not far away, although mobbed by no fewer than five adult lapwings.

As a rule the Windhover does not build any kind of nest. When breeding in woods it contents itself with the old home of a carrion crow or magpie, and when in a cliff it adopts a slight hollow in the mould on a ledge or in a crevice. Not long ago, however, I had a nest shown to me in Westmorland that had undoubtedly been built by the bird. It consisted of a few dead bracken stalks placed on a bare shelf of rock in a limestone cliff.

The eggs number five or six as a rule, although I remember on one occasion finding seven. They are of a dirty creamy-white ground colour, thickly spotted and blotched with dark brownish red.

The Kestrel breeds practically all over the British Islands, and seems equally at home in the chalk cliffs in the south of England, in the woods of the Midlands, or in a craggy gorge on the desolate moors of the North.

THE ROBIN.

"The most familiar bird of our country."

"Young Robins in their first dress of feathers do not at all resemble their parents."

THE ROBIN

NEXT to the house sparrow, Robin Redbreast is, perhaps, the most familiar bird of the country-side. It is partly resident and partly migratory, and it is said that individuals wintering away from our fog-laden climate are brighter in coloration when they return in the spring than those that have been faithful to the land of their nativity.

Few birds are held in such veneration by all classes of the community. And there are many reasons to account for this. Its bold, engaging manners, usefulness in gardens, and the fact that it enlivens our leafless hedgerows with its sweet and plaintive song when nearly all other feathered vocalists are silent, are not the least amongst them.

Robins usually build their nests in holes in banks, and in walls where a brick or a stone has fallen out, but frequently select the oddest quarters for their little homes of leaves, rootlets, moss and hair. I have seen them in bookcases in occupied bedrooms, in horse-collars hanging up in stables, inside old kettles, teapots, coffee-pots, jam jars, old tin cans and even husks of cocoanuts emptied by tits during the previous winter.

The eggs, as a rule, number five or six, but as many as seven and even eight may upon occasion be found. They are white or pale grey, freckled, and blotched with dull light red.

Young Robins in their first dress of feathers do not at all resemble their parents, for, instead of having olive-brown backs and orange-red breasts, they are clothed in coats of sober brown

of varying shades. The feathers on the breast are dull reddish-brown, bordered

ROBIN'S NEST IN AN OLD TIN CAN.

with a darker hue. When sitting quite still in a hedgerow through which the sunshine is playing fitfully, their coloration renders them difficult to detect, and is thus as protective as that of their more experienced parents is conspicuous.

Individual Robins are by a little kindness easily tamed. A male that dwells for the greater part of his time in my orchard will fly down to me when I call his name, and take food from my hand. His mate, on the contrary, is very shy, and will not come near me. If a rival should happen to come along, my bird at once assumes a fighting attitude, and the intruder is soon made to understand something of the laws of proprietorship.

A Robin will occasionally live quite a solitary life. I have met with such birds dwelling upon small treeless islands, and near lonely shepherd houses high up amongst the fells.

The males of this species sometimes gratify their parental instincts by feeding the chicks of birds in no way related to them. I have watched an individual giving grubs and worms to nestling song thrushes, and a Robin with only one leg constantly amused himself a season or two ago by feeding young sparrows round a friend's house in Cumberland.

Water Vole.

"His enemy is seated in silent contemplation of his victory on a partially submerged stump."

THE WATER VOLE

THE Water Vole or Water Rat, as it is often erroneously called, is about a foot in length, one-third of this being accounted for by its tail, which, unlike that of the Common Rat, is covered with short, closely-adherent hairs. Its head is chubby and beaver-like, the ears being almost hidden by the surrounding fur. As a rule it is of a uniform greyish-brown colour, slightly tinged with red, but not infrequently black specimens may be met with, especially in Scotland.

It is common nearly all over Great Britain, but is not found in Ireland, although it enjoys a wide geographical range in both Europe and Asia.

The banks of sluggish streams, canals, ponds, dams and ditches are its favourite haunts. In these it excavates long tortuous burrows. When disturbed, it generally startles the wayfarer by suddenly diving into the water and swimming beneath the surface to some submerged hole leading to its retreat. Upon occasion the animal propels itself through the water by the use of its hind feet only; but, although it swims and dives with such great facility, it is not web-footed.

The Water Vole feeds entirely upon vegetables, and it is amusing to watch it on a calm summer's evening dive to the root of a sword-flag, gnaw a piece of the plant off near the root, and swim with it to some coign of vantage, where

THE WATER VOLE.

it sits up like a squirrel and munches the sweet succulent part, allowing the older and more fibrous portions to fall into the water and float away. The individual figured in our plate was in the act of eating grass on the bank of a stream when the photograph was secured. I have also seen the animal eating the leaves of primroses, and common duckweed occasionally proves acceptable. In the winter, turnips, mangel-wurzel, potatoes and the bark of osiers are consumed.

The great natural enemies of the Water Vole are weazels and owls, and it is occasionally speared and swallowed whole by the heron.

Whilst engaged in taking the photographs illustrating the present article, I saw two Voles engaged in battle. They bit each other and boxed with their fore-paws like hares, and when the combat ended the vanquished animal swam up stream for a little distance and, landing on the bank, went through a most elaborate toilet. In the picture at the head of the article he is seen peeping from a burrow, whilst his enemy is seated in silent contemplation of his victory on a partially submerged stump.

The Water Vole brings forth from two to six young ones at a litter.

Sedge Warbler on Nest.

"The nest is built amongst thick sedge grass."

THE SEDGE WARBLER

WHERE the wind rustles in great reed beds, and the waters dance and ripple in spring sunshine, the Sedge Warbler's merry, hurried song is sure to be heard. It is our commonest warbler, and inhabits the shores of sedge-fringed lakes and broads, osier beds, the banks of sluggish streams, disused canals, and old clay-pits; wherever, indeed, aquatic vegetation grows in sufficient quantity and strength to form suitable cover, throughout the three kingdoms.

Although clothed in sober, inconspicuous tints of brown this bird does not care to show itself very much, and is consequently, more often heard than seen. If, however, the observer will keep still for a time, he will discover that it has a habit of working its way to the topmost stems or branches, and then flitting to another part, frequently singing as it goes. Its two leading characteristics are restlessness and garrulity. Whenever I visit the Norfolk broads—where this species is very numerous — I always go to sleep the first night with its persistent loud, imitative song jerking and clattering through my brain. The bird does not seem content with the long hours that span the sun's arch on a June day, but sings on and on until far into the night. Indeed, it is ready to oblige anybody, who is curious enough to listen, with a sample of its vocal powers at any hour of the night, and if you clap your hands, make a splash in the water, or any other noise near its sleeping-quarters, in reed bed or bush, it will instantly wake up and

THE SEDGE WARBLER.

sing as blithely as if it were broad noontide. In fact, when the qualities of its music and borrowed notes are taken into consideration, one is inevitably driven to the conclusion that the Sedge Warbler lacks discretion, and overdoes its part in the great feathered orchestra.

The nest is built amongst thick sedge grass, or brambles, in bushes and sometimes on pollards. It is generally nearer the ground than that of the Reed Warbler, is never suspended, and not so neatly constructed. I have watched the industrious female making her little home of grass, moss, willow-down, and horse-hair, whilst her mate was idling around, a mildly interested spectator.

The eggs number five or six of a yellowish brown ground-colour, mottled and clouded with darker brown Sometimes specimens are found marked with black hair-like lines on the larger end.

The cuckoo frequently victimises the Sedge Warbler, and it is a comical sight to see the wee birds feeding and attending their giant foster-chick. Their industry and solicitude are astonishing. All day long they are flitting hither and thither in search of insect food, and if any form of danger should approach the nest they utter their harsh scolding notes, and show every sign of distress until it has passed. Why they should expend so much care and affection upon a creature that never shows any sign of gratitude, or other lovable quality, is a mystery.

Sedge Warblers arrive in this country in April and May, and depart again in September.

The Ringed Plover.

"Young Ringed Plovers run about directly they leave the egg-shell."

THE RINGED PLOVER

WE have few British birds that present a more complete scheme of protective coloration than the Ringed Plover. Adult birds, eggs, and young in down, all harmonise with their natural surroundings in such a way as to make them difficult to detect. On many occasions I have been quite puzzled to locate the whereabouts of a Ringed Dotterel (as the bird is sometimes called), although I could plainly hear its musical call-notes, and have only picked up the creature with my glasses through movement when it took one of its characteristic short, rapid runs.

This species resides with us all the year round, having its flocks swollen considerably in the winter by migrants from more northern and inclement parts of Europe.

It breeds on sand, shingle, and rocks by the seashore, on the banks of rivers and large bodies of fresh water. When the eggs are laid on sand or shingle a slight hollow is scratched out for their reception, but when on rock a few small shells are generally provided for them to lie upon. Some years ago I found a clutch in a nest formed of pebbles, which bore evidence of having been carried by the bird and placed on a patch of smooth green turf, and the example illustrated at the end of this article plainly shows that the light coloured pebbles had been collected in order to render the appearance of the eggs less conspicuous. On the other hand, I once found a nest containing three eggs and a newly hatched chick lying in a slight hollow amongst short silver-weed which did not appear to produce any harmonising effect.

When the sitting female is disturbed she generally runs a considerable distance from her eggs before uttering a sound of any kind. I have frequently noticed that when the eggs are laid upon

RINGED PLOVER.

soft, loose sand they show a tendency towards the period of hatching to rest with their small ends almost straight down.

The eggs of this species number four, of a pale buff or cream ground-colour, spotted with small, evenly-distributed bluish-grey and blackish-brown spots. Two broods are frequently reared during the same season, hence eggs may be found as early as March, and occasionally as late as August.

Young Ringed Plovers run about directly they leave the egg-shell, and unless they are seen when moving and carefully marked down, are most difficult to find.

If a bird of this species should happen to nest close by an oyster-catcher, she has a most unhappy time of it, for the latter bird will not tolerate her presence on ground where her own young ones are running about. On the other hand, the Ringed Plover will sometimes attack and drive off even the lesser black-backed gull in defence of her chicks.

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